

MODERN WORLD LEADERS

Jacques Chirac

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Pope John Paul II
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Jacques Chirac

Alan Allport





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ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER, JR.

On Leadership

eadership, it may be said, is really what makes the world go round. Love no doubt smoothes the passage; but love is a private transaction between consenting adults. Leadership is a public transaction with history. The idea of leadership affirms the capacity of individuals to move, inspire, and mobilize masses of people so that they act together in pursuit of an end. Sometimes leadership serves good purposes, sometimes bad; but whether the end is benign or evil, great leaders are those men and women who leave their personal stamp on history.

Now, the very concept of leadership implies the proposition that individuals can make a difference. This proposition has never been universally accepted. From classical times to the present day, eminent thinkers have regarded individuals as no more than the agents and pawns of larger forces, whether the gods and goddesses of the ancient world or, in the modern era, race, class, nation, the dialectic, the will of the people, the spirit of the times, history itself. Against such forces, the individual dwindles into insignificance.

So contends the thesis of historical determinism. Tolstoy's great novel *War and Peace* offers a famous statement of the case. Why, Tolstoy asked, did millions of men in the Napoleonic Wars, denying their human feelings and their common sense, move back and forth across Europe slaughtering their fellows? "The war," Tolstoy answered, "was bound to happen simply because it was bound to happen." All prior history determined it. As for leaders, they, Tolstoy said, "are but the labels that serve to give a name to an end and, like labels, they have the least possible

connection with the event." The greater the leader, "the more conspicuous the inevitability and the predestination of every act he commits." The leader, said Tolstoy, is "the slave of history."

Determinism takes many forms. Marxism is the determinism of class, Nazism the determinism of race. But the idea of men and women as the slaves of history runs athwart the deepest human instincts. Rigid determinism abolishes the idea of human freedom—the assumption of free choice that underlies every move we make, every word we speak, every thought we think. It abolishes the idea of human responsibility, since it is manifestly unfair to reward or punish people for actions that are by definition beyond their control. No one can live consistently by any deterministic creed. The Marxist states prove this themselves by their extreme susceptibility to the cult of leadership.

More than that, history refutes the idea that individuals make no difference. In December 1931, a British politician crossing Fifth Avenue in New York City between 76th and 77th streets around 10:30 P.M. looked in the wrong direction and was knocked down by an automobile—a moment, he later recalled, of a man aghast, a world aglare: "I do not understand why I was not broken like an eggshell or squashed like a gooseberry." Fourteen months later an American politician, sitting in an open car in Miami, Florida, was fired on by an assassin; the man beside him was hit. Those who believe that individuals make no difference to history might well ponder whether the next two decades would have been the same had Mario Constasino's car killed Winston Churchill in 1931 and Giuseppe Zangara's bullet killed Franklin Roosevelt in 1933. Suppose, in addition, that Lenin had died of typhus in Siberia in 1895 and that Hitler had been killed on the western front in 1916. What would the twentieth century have looked like now?

For better or for worse, individuals do make a difference. "The notion that a people can run itself and its affairs anonymously," wrote the philosopher William James, "is now well known to be the silliest of absurdities. Mankind does nothing save through initiatives on the part of inventors, great or small,

and imitation by the rest of us—these are the sole factors in human progress. Individuals of genius show the way, and set the patterns, which common people then adopt and follow."

Leadership, James suggests, means leadership in thought as well as in action. In the long run, leaders in thought may well make the greater difference to the world. "The ideas of economists and political philosophers, both when they are right and when they are wrong," wrote John Maynard Keynes, "are more powerful than is commonly understood. Indeed the world is ruled by little else. Practical men, who believe themselves to be quite exempt from any intellectual influences, are usually the slaves of some defunct economist. . . . The power of vested interests is vastly exaggerated compared with the gradual encroachment of ideas."

But, as Woodrow Wilson once said, "Those only are leaders of men, in the general eye, who lead in action. . . . It is at their hands that new thought gets its translation into the crude language of deeds." Leaders in thought often invent in solitude and obscurity, leaving to later generations the tasks of imitation. Leaders in action—the leaders portrayed in this series—have to be effective in their own time.

And they cannot be effective by themselves. They must act in response to the rhythms of their age. Their genius must be adapted, in a phrase from William James, "to the receptivities of the moment." Leaders are useless without followers. "There goes the mob," said the French politician, hearing a clamor in the streets. "I am their leader. I must follow them." Great leaders turn the inchoate emotions of the mob to purposes of their own. They seize on the opportunities of their time, the hopes, fears, frustrations, crises, potentialities. They succeed when events have prepared the way for them, when the community is awaiting to be aroused, when they can provide the clarifying and organizing ideas. Leadership completes the circuit between the individual and the mass and thereby alters history.

It may alter history for better or for worse. Leaders have been responsible for the most extravagant follies and most monstrous crimes that have beset suffering humanity. They have also been vital in such gains as humanity has made in individual freedom, religious and racial tolerance, social justice, and respect for human rights.

There is no sure way to tell in advance who is going to lead for good and who for evil. But a glance at the gallery of men and women in Modern World Leaders suggests some useful tests.

One test is this: Do leaders lead by force or by persuasion? By command or by consent? Through most of history, leadership was exercised by the divine right of authority. The duty of followers was to defer and to obey. "Theirs not to reason why/Theirs but to do and die." On occasion, as with the so-called enlightened despots of the eighteenth century in Europe, absolutist leadership was animated by humane purposes. More often, absolutism nourished the passion for domination, land, gold, and conquest and resulted in tyranny.

The great revolution of modern times has been the revolution of equality. "Perhaps no form of government," wrote the British historian James Bryce in his study of the United States, *The American Commonwealth*, "needs great leaders so much as democracy." The idea that all people should be equal in their legal condition has undermined the old structure of authority, hierarchy, and deference. The revolution of equality has had two contrary effects on the nature of leadership. For equality, as Alexis de Tocqueville pointed out in his great study *Democracy in America*, might mean equality in servitude as well as equality in freedom.

"I know of only two methods of establishing equality in the political world," Tocqueville wrote. "Rights must be given to every citizen, or none at all to anyone . . . save one, who is the master of all." There was no middle ground "between the sovereignty of all and the absolute power of one man." In his astonishing prediction of twentieth-century totalitarian dictatorship, Tocqueville explained how the revolution of equality could lead to the *Führerprinzip* and more terrible absolutism than the world had ever known.

But when rights are given to every citizen and the sover-eignty of all is established, the problem of leadership takes a new form, becomes more exacting than ever before. It is easy to issue commands and enforce them by the rope and the stake, the concentration camp and the gulag. It is much harder to use argument and achievement to overcome opposition and win consent. The Founding Fathers of the United States understood the difficulty. They believed that history had given them the opportunity to decide, as Alexander Hamilton wrote in the first Federalist Paper, whether men are indeed capable of basing government on "reflection and choice, or whether they are forever destined to depend . . . on accident and force."

Government by reflection and choice called for a new style of leadership and a new quality of followership. It required leaders to be responsive to popular concerns, and it required followers to be active and informed participants in the process. Democracy does not eliminate emotion from politics; sometimes it fosters demagoguery; but it is confident that, as the greatest of democratic leaders put it, you cannot fool all of the people all of the time. It measures leadership by results and retires those who overreach or falter or fail.

It is true that in the long run despots are measured by results too. But they can postpone the day of judgment, sometimes indefinitely, and in the meantime they can do infinite harm. It is also true that democracy is no guarantee of virtue and intelligence in government, for the voice of the people is not necessarily the voice of God. But democracy, by assuring the right of opposition, offers built-in resistance to the evils inherent in absolutism. As the theologian Reinhold Niebuhr summed it up, "Man's capacity for justice makes democracy possible, but man's inclination to justice makes democracy necessary."

A second test for leadership is the end for which power is sought. When leaders have as their goal the supremacy of a master race or the promotion of totalitarian revolution or the acquisition and exploitation of colonies or the protection of greed and privilege or the preservation of personal power, it is likely that their leadership will do little to advance the cause of humanity. When their goal is the abolition of slavery, the liberation of women, the enlargement of opportunity for the poor and powerless, the extension of equal rights to racial minorities, the defense of the freedoms of expression and opposition, it is likely that their leadership will increase the sum of human liberty and welfare.

Leaders have done great harm to the world. They have also conferred great benefits. You will find both sorts in this series. Even "good" leaders must be regarded with a certain wariness. Leaders are not demigods; they put on their trousers one leg after another just like ordinary mortals. No leader is infallible, and every leader needs to be reminded of this at regular intervals. Irreverence irritates leaders but is their salvation. Unquestioning submission corrupts leaders and demeans followers. Making a cult of a leader is always a mistake. Fortunately hero worship generates its own antidote. "Every hero," said Emerson, "becomes a bore at last."

The single benefit the great leaders confer is to embolden the rest of us to live according to our own best selves, to be active, insistent, and resolute in affirming our own sense of things. For great leaders attest to the reality of human freedom against the supposed inevitabilities of history. And they attest to the wisdom and power that may lie within the most unlikely of us, which is why Abraham Lincoln remains the supreme example of great leadership. A great leader, said Emerson, exhibits new possibilities to all humanity. "We feed on genius. . . . Great men exist that there may be greater men."

Great leaders, in short, justify themselves by emancipating and empowering their followers. So humanity struggles to master its destiny, remembering with Alexis de Tocqueville: "It is true that around every man a fatal circle is traced beyond which he cannot pass; but within the wide verge of that circle he is powerful and free; as it is with man, so with communities."

CHAPTER

1

"Paris Is Burning!"

ABOUT SIX O'CLOCK ONE THURSDAY EVENING IN LATE OCTOBER 2005, THREE

boys, 17-year-olds Muhittin Altun and Zyed Benna, and their younger friend Bouna Traore, 15, were walking home with a group of other teenagers on their way back from the local soccer field when something made them panic and run. What precisely happened that night is still hotly disputed, and will probably remain unknown for certain. According to Muhittin, police cars suddenly appeared, sirens wailing and lights flashing, and policemen with dogs and stun guns jumped out and began chasing the crowd of boys. The police later claimed that they were in the area investigating a robbery and that they did not chase Muhittin and his friends. Whatever the truth, the three boys fled through a patch of undergrowth and reached a high barbed-wire fence. Wanting to escape the scene, they scaled the fence, not paying any attention to the skull and crossbones warning signs, and climbed inside. There they hid quietly for

more than 30 minutes. Suddenly there were two flashes of heat and light, and the three boys were flung ferociously into the air. They were hiding inside an electricity substation and had been hit by 20,000-volt surges of power. Muhittin's clothes caught fire and he suffered third-degree burns over his body, but he managed to crawl over the fence once more and stagger homeward for help. Zyed and Bouna were not so fortunate; they were killed instantly.

The needless deaths of two young men would be a terrible event under any circumstances. But few could have predicted that this small tragedy would, within a few days, bring one of the richest and most advanced countries in the world to the brink of chaos and require its president to announce a state of emergency, suspending the civil liberties of millions of people.

Muhittin, Zyed, and Bouna all lived in Clichy-sous-Bois, a northeastern suburb of Paris. Their homes were only about a 20-minute drive from the glittering center of the City of Lights. Zyed's father worked as a truck driver just yards away from the Eiffel Tower. But the world he and his son lived in bore little resemblance to the Paris tourists usually see, the Paris of the Arc de Triomphe and the Champs-Élysées. Clichy-sous-Bois is a dingy concrete slum; most of its 29,000 residents are packed into crumbling high-rise public apartments. Like 80 percent of the town's inhabitants, the three boys were Muslims: Muhittin's family was originally from Turkey, Zyed's from Tunisia, and Bouna's from Mauritania. Zyed's father was fortunate, for one-quarter of the local heads of households are out of work. Clichy-sous-Bois is indistinguishable from dozens of other suburbs surrounding Paris and France's other major cities. Known euphemistically as the quartiers difficiles, or "problem areas," they are dumping grounds for poor, mainly immigrant families and are ridden with addiction, crime, poverty, and other social problems.

The relationship between the community and the police is fraught with tension. Locals complain that the authorities



Muhittin Altun (*center*) poses with his father, Museyin (*right*), and brother Sofian (*left*) in their suburban Paris home on December 15, 2005. The tragic deaths of Altun's friends weeks earlier were blamed on social and class tensions and sparked nationwide riots. Altun's shirt reads "Dead for Nothing."

make no effort to clamp down on vandalism, drug trafficking, and theft, while police harass and intimidate law-abiding inhabitants—which was why, it was suggested, the three boys ran on that fateful night. The police respond that they get no cooperation from the residents of Clichy's lawless public housing, and that they are routinely attacked by stone-throwing youths. A wall of mutual suspicion and resentment has risen between the people of towns like Clichy-sous-Bois and the representatives of the French state. It was unseasonably warm that October; people were hot, irritable, easily roused to anger. Violence was crackling in the air like electricity itself. All it took was a single spark to set it off.

By the following evening, Friday, October 28, word of the deaths of the two boys had spread throughout

Clichy-sous-Bois. Hundreds of irate youths began assembling in the town center, goading the outnumbered police, who called for reinforcements. Cars were set on fire and garbage cans were converted into makeshift barricades. Firemen who turned up to put out the burning cars were pelted with stones. Shops were looted and set ablaze. A running battle began between police and rioters, in which several people on both sides were injured. The police claimed that they came under gunfire. In the early morning the streets cleared, but the following night, Saturday, the rioters were back in Clichy again. The police began using CRS tear gas to try to disperse the crowd. The violence began to spread. Copycat rioting broke out in other largely immigrant suburbs in the département (county) of Seine-Saint-Denis. Within a couple of days, most of France's major cities were experiencing nightly disturbances. Cars and stores were not the only targets; schools, town halls, post offices, police stations and other government buildings were firebombed. Churches and mosques were damaged. At least one person was killed by rioters. Law and order began visibly breaking down in France. In a country that has a long tradition of revolutionary violence, people openly feared the collapse of civil authority.

Where, many French people asked, was their president in all of this? For the first six days of the rioting, Jacques Chirac, France's head of state, was conspicuously silent. While his ministers squabbled in public about the causes of the violence, Chirac appeared curiously uninvolved in what was perhaps the most serious crisis of his administration since he was first elected as president in 1995. Finally, on November 2, Chirac spoke out, urging calm on both sides. "The law must be applied firmly and in a spirit of dialogue and respect," he said. This comment, some believed, was Chirac's way of trying to distance himself from the aggressive policing tactics of his interior minister, Nicolas Sarkozy, who had described the rioters as "scum" and "rabble." In any event, it did little to calm tempers.

On November 8, following further rioting, Chirac announced a state of emergency throughout France. This allowed his government to enforce a nighttime curfew, search persons and premises without a court warrant, outlaw public gatherings, and censor newspapers and other media. Whether due to these measures, or simply because the passions of the original protest had started to ebb, France slowly began to return to normal. On November 17, the police announced that the rioting appeared to be at an end, although the state of emergency was kept in place until January 4, 2006. In all, 274 towns had been affected by the riots. More than 2,800 people had been arrested, 126 police and firefighters injured, and nearly 9,000 vehicles had been destroyed. The total monetary damage was estimated at almost \$250 million.

For Jacques Chirac, the chain of events set off by the deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traore was the low point of what had already been a disastrous year. In a national referendum in May 2005, French voters had decisively rejected the new European Union constitution, a decision that many saw as critical of the president himself. In July, Paris lost to London in its bid to host the 2012 Olympics. Throughout the year, there were repeated accusations of political corruption and numerous rows within Chirac's ruling coalition. In September, the president suffered a slight stroke, which although not medically debilitating drew attention to his age—he was 72 at the time—and seemed to symbolize the frailty of his government. What made the November riots so politically embarrassing to Chirac was that he had entered power seven years earlier promising to heal the "social rift" that divided France along fault lines of class, religion, and ethnicity. But instead of uniting the country, Chirac's critics alleged, his policies had only worsened its social and racial tensions. Internationally, the president's very vocal opposition to the American and British invasion of Iraq in 2003 had (it was claimed) pushed France into the diplomatic shade and made the once-powerful nation more irrelevant than ever in



On November 14, 2005, after weeks of rioting, Jacques Chirac addressed the nation via a live telecast, in which he announced a continued state of emergency. French citizens responded with the torching of more than 200 vehicles. While acknowledging the emotions behind the unrest, Chirac said, "We can accomplish nothing if we do not respect the rules."

global politics. With high unemployment, a sluggish economy, widespread lack of confidence in the old ruling establishment, and fear about the breakdown of its unique "social model" of democracy, France by the end of 2005 was a country very ill at ease with itself. Chirac himself admitted that a "profound malaise" (sickness) had stricken his nation. Whether or not he could be held personally to blame for all their troubles, the French had evidently lost faith in their leader. In a poll that December only one percent of voters wanted Chirac to stand for a third term of office in April 2007.

Whether Chirac will take that advice remains to be seen. But even if he does finally retire at the end of his second term as president, his legacy and its implications for France will continue for many years afterward. Chirac has been a presence in French political life for nearly half a century, holding many of the country's key positions of power: senior civil servant, cabinet minister, prime minister, mayor of Paris, and ultimately president. He has worked alongside or in opposition to all of France's most powerful statesmen of modern times, figures such as Charles de Gaulle, Georges Pompidou, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, and François Mitterrand. Chirac's story mirrors that of France's during the turbulent years that have followed the creation of the Fifth Republic in 1958, and he has been at the center of many of the country's defining events. As a young soldier, he served in Algeria during that country's War of Independence, a conflict that tore France apart. He took part in the negotiations that brought the revolutionary 1968 student protests to an end. As President Chirac, he has, for good or ill, guided France through turbulent changes in its society, its political makeup, its relationship to the European Union, and most recently, and controversially, through the shock waves of the Global War on Terror. Chirac has been a part of French public life for so long that, whether they love him or hate him, the French will no doubt find his departure from the political stage historic and his absence strange. To study Chirac is, then, in many ways to study modern France, a country very much in transition, with an uncertain future.

CHAPTER

France in the Era of General de Gaulle

on the Evening of June 18, 1940, an obscure Middle-Aged French general called Charles de Gaulle sat in one of the BBC's broadcasting rooms in London and delivered a short speech over the radio. Almost nobody heard it. France at that moment was convulsing under one of the worst military crises in its history, and few Frenchmen had the time or patience to listen to the ramblings of an unknown tank commander who had fled the country a day earlier. De Gaulle's speech disappeared into the ether, almost universally ignored. Hardly anyone, except perhaps the speaker himself, took it seriously. In fact, although no one realized it at the time, a decisive moment had just taken place in the story of France. If any single event can be said to be the starting point of modern French history, it is de Gaulle's radio appeal of June 18. If any person can be said to be the

founding father of contemporary France, it is that strange, petulant, indefatigable statesman and visionary, who would shape the political destiny of his country for three decades. It was de Gaulle who would inspire the young Jacques Chirac to enter public life and influence so many of his political beliefs. Today's France begins with "the general."

Nothing in de Gaulle's early years suggested that he would one day achieve greatness. Born in 1890 in the city of Lille in northern France, he came from a prosperous, politically conservative, middle-class family. As a young man, de Gaulle joined the army. He was a brave, hardworking, and intelligent junior officer, serious minded and deeply patriotic, but not particularly outstanding in any way. He served with distinction during World War I (1914-1918), being wounded several times and taken prisoner. After the war, he rose through the ranks to become a colonel, but his controversial views on the need to modernize the French army, particularly with tanks, made him unpopular with many of his superiors, who believed that morale and tradition were more important within the army than new technology or tactics. When war broke out with Germany for the second time in 1939, he commanded a single armored brigade, and it did not appear as if he would be allowed to play any major role in the upcoming struggle.

All that changed, however, when on May 15, 1940, the Germans suddenly attacked the weak French defenses on the Meuse River at the town of Sedan. The Germans achieved a decisive breakthrough using the kind of advanced tank and airpower that de Gaulle had been trying unsuccessfully to introduce into his own country's armed forces for several years. France's army, stunned by the blow, reeled back in panic and disorder. De Gaulle was hurriedly promoted to general and given command of a tank division, but the Germans were now steaming across France and the opportunity to counterattack had passed. The government in Paris resigned, and Marshal Philippe Pétain, a famous hero of World War I, emerged from



Just after the Nazi occupation of France in June 1940, General Charles de Gaulle delivered a broadcast to the French people from a radio booth in London. De Gaulle led the Free French Forces from London throughout the occupation.

retirement and was given emergency powers to try to save France in its hour of desperation. Pétain, believing that all hope was lost, began negotiating surrender terms with the Germans. De Gaulle refused to accept this humiliating capitulation and flew to England on June 17, determined to continue the fight somehow. In his first radio broadcast to his countrymen, he admitted that the Germans had won a temporary success, but he insisted that the war was not over. "Has the last word been said? Must hope disappear? Is defeat final? No!" These defiant words were, for the time being, in vain. On June 22, Pétain's government signed an armistice with Hitler that surrendered three-fifths of the country to the Germans, leaving a rump state that would be governed from the small spa town of Vichy.

France's crushing defeat in 1940 left psychological scars that continue to influence the country's politics and society to this day. At the time, the French considered themselves Europe's dominant power and one of the major colonial empires in the world. They controlled huge territories in North Africa, West Africa, and Southeast Asia. The thunderclap of invasion and conquest after just six weeks of fighting shook France's selfconfidence to the core, and its people are still struggling with the consequences of that failure even now, more than 60 years later. Some would argue that ever since 1940, France has been seeking to overturn this disaster, and to prove to itself as well as to other countries that it remains a great nation. It is for this reason that de Gaulle's almost lone defiance that grim summer would eventually become so important in recreating France's self-respect. When he made his first radio broadcasts, de Gaulle had few supporters, little money, and no military equipment to speak of. All he could offer to his countrymen was his own untiring certainty that victory would somehow be theirs, no matter the odds. De Gaulle had a mystical, almost religious faith in the spirit of French nationhood, and he believed that if just one Frenchman continued the fight from abroad, then France itself was not lost. Fate had apparently decided that he was to be that one man.

With time, more French soldiers, sailors, and airmen would rally to de Gaulle's Free French flag, refusing to accept the authority of the German-controlled Vichy state. De Gaulle eventually persuaded British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt that he alone represented the authentic French government. As World War II progressed, and the Allies began to push back the Germans and Italians within Europe, de Gaulle's power within the French émigré community grew. On June 6, 1944, the British, Canadians, and Americans landed troops in Normandy and began the liberation of occupied France. On August 25, Allied forces entered Paris. De Gaulle wasted no time in establishing his authority in



Crowds of French patriots line Paris's Champs Élysées as Allied tanks parade through the Arc de Triomphe on August 25, 1944. The liberation of Paris was only the first step on a long journey of healing the wounds inflicted upon the nation during World War II.

the capital. Defying the bullets of the German snipers who were still lurking about Paris's boulevards, the general made an emotional speech from the city's town hall and quickly established a provisional French government, with himself as president. The following May, Germany surrendered and World War II in Europe was over; de Gaulle's prophecy of ultimate victory was vindicated at last. He was now unquestionably the most famous living Frenchman and his country's adored savior—on the surface, at least.

FRANCE MAY HAVE EMERGED AS ONE OF THE VICTOR NATIONS IN 1945, BUT THE LEGACY OF OCCUPATION WAS A DISCORDANT ONE.

De Gaulle had inherited a deeply divided country. France may have emerged as one of the victor nations in 1945, but the legacy of occupation was a discordant one. It was necessary for the general to foster the myth that the majority of French citizens had been patriotic resisters of the Germans throughout the war, but, in fact, most people had adopted a passive, wait-and-see attitude toward their conquerors—and some had openly welcomed Pétain's Vichy regime as an opportunity to settle old scores. Vichy's involvement in the Jewish Holocaust was a particularly gruesome chapter in France's war. The Pétain government deported 76,000 Jews to Hitler's Third Reich, of whom only a few thousand survived the concentration camps. More than 125,000 Vichy officials were eventually tried for collaboration by the postwar French state, with perhaps 10,000 more summarily executed by vigilantes. Even the resistance movement was split between conservative supporters of de Gaulle—who became known as Gaullists—and Communists, whose ultimate allegiance was to Stalin's U.S.S.R. rather than their own country. These wartime rivalries were translated into fierce party political divisions in the postwar French government, which was proclaimed as the Fourth Republic, replacing the Third Republic that had been defeated in June 1940.

De Gaulle's tenure as provisional president was short. He was frustrated by party conflicts and was unhappy with the proposed constitutional settlement of the Fourth Republic, which to his mind gave too much power to the elected legislature and not enough to the president. Miscalculating the public mood, he resigned his post in January 1946, believing that his

popularity among the masses was so great that they would demand his immediate return to office under conditions of his own choosing. But after six years of war, the French were weary of drama, and de Gaulle's departure was met with little objection. Stung by his people's apparent ingratitude, the general retired to his country home to write his war memoirs. He did not completely withdraw from public life, however, for in 1947 he founded Rally of the French People (Rassemblement du Peuple Français, or the RPF), an organization to propagate his political ideas. This, the first official Gaullist party, would after many years and different names ultimately evolve into Chirac's Union for a Popular Movement (UMP).

The 12 years of the Fourth Republic were paradoxically for France a time of great comfort and of great crisis. Economically, the country began a postwar boom that would continue until the early 1970s, a period of full employment, rising incomes, and generous welfare provisions, which brought hitherto unknown prosperity to France's ordinary people. These Thirty Glorious Years (Trente Glorieuses) would see a huge expansion in the country's higher education system and a shift in employment from predominantly blue-collar manufacturing to white-collar clerical and service jobs. Many of these were civil-service positions within the growing state bureaucracy or in one of France's many government-owned industries in the power, transportation, and communication sectors. Under the more difficult circumstances that followed the ending of the Thirty Glorious Years, many French people understandably looked back at the period with nostalgia and regret.

On the other hand, France's postwar attempts to defend its old colonial possessions in Asia and Africa were disastrous, and they led directly to the collapse of the Fourth Republic. The country's two most important colonial territories were Indochina (now Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia) and Algeria; both of which had been occupied by the Japanese and Germans respectively during the war. It was difficult for the imperial

"liberators" to reassert their authority after such a humiliating defeat. In both colonies, armed nationalist movements rose to fight the French. In Indochina in 1954, French paratroopers were defeated in the decisive battle of Dien Bien Phu, and shortly afterward the Paris government agreed to withdraw from the region and establish a number of independent successor states. A civil war quickly broke out between Communist-dominated North Vietnam and its southern neighbor, a bloody and intractable conflict in which the United States became heavily involved.

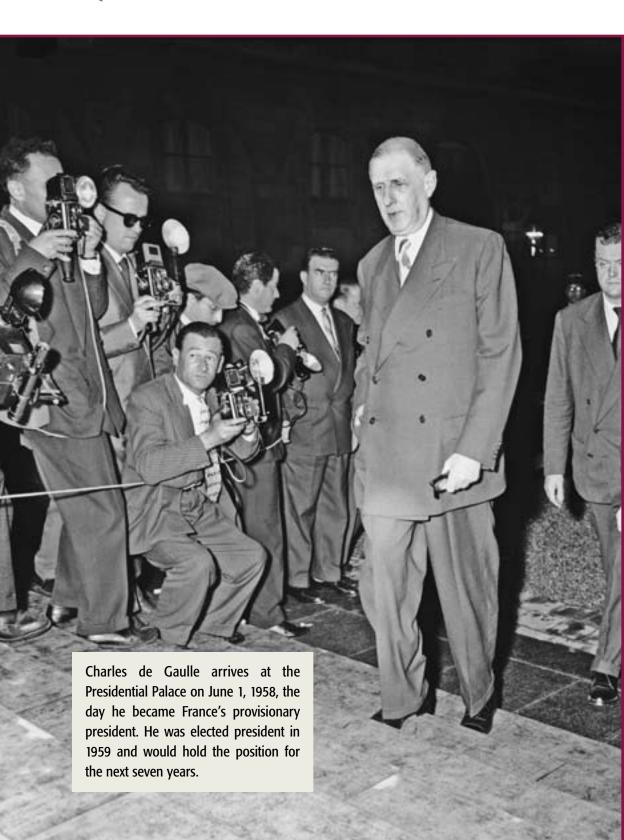
In Algeria, meanwhile, there was a brutal cycle of atrocities and counter-atrocities committed by the Arab nationalist army (the FLN) and the French settler population—nicknamed the pieds-noirs, or "black feet"—who vehemently opposed any change in the existing political order. By 1958, half a million French soldiers were bogged down in an increasingly bitter and controversial struggle against Algerian terrorists. Torture was routinely used against suspected FLN supporters, provoking an outcry both at home and abroad. As the conflict dragged on, many right-wing French soldiers and colonists grew angry at the apparent weakness and vacillation of the Fourth Republic's politicians, suspecting that they were going to be betrayed in a negotiated settlement with the Algerians. To avoid this, the hard-liners were willing to take the desperate step of overthrowing their own government in a coup d'etat. Only a strong, decisive leader could (they thought) crush the Algerian nationalists once and for all. Who better than General de Gaulle?

On May 13, 1958, pieds-noirs in Algiers, the colony's capital, seized control of government buildings and declared an emergency government. They appealed for de Gaulle to emerge from retirement in his country's moment of crisis. Two days later, the general announced that he was willing to "take on the powers of the Republic" if they were legally given to him, on condition that the Fourth Republic was replaced with a new constitution giving France's president much greater authority.

Faced with open mutiny by the pieds-noirs and the army, the majority of French politicians felt they had no choice but to accept de Gaulle's offer. On June 1, de Gaulle became provisional president with emergency powers; three months later, his new constitution was approved by national referendum. In January of the following year, his presidential tenure was resoundingly confirmed in a parliamentary election. The Fifth Republic of France was inaugurated.

De Gaulle's return to power was hailed by the pieds-noirs as a victory for Algérie Française (French Algeria); after all, the general was a famously conservative patriot, and a staunch defender of France's colonial tradition. Unfortunately for them, however, de Gaulle was above everything else a pragmatist, and he soon realized that in the long term independence for Algeria was inevitable. He began negotiations with the FLN that would eventually result in a complete French withdrawal in 1962. The soldiers and colonists who had schemed to put de Gaulle into office felt betrayed. There were several unsuccessful coup attempts in a desperate bid to halt France's retreat from Algeria. The president himself was targeted for assassination. But the exhausted French public had little time for the vexatious colony any longer, and de Gaulle's personal authority was such that he was able to suppress all challenges to his power. The war was over, but like the Vichy regime, its bitter memories would continue to haunt French political life for many years to come.

De Gaulle would remain president of France for the next seven years. Despite his willingness to accept Algeria's independence, de Gaulle remained passionately committed to the idea of France as one of the world's great powers, and he pursued what was called the "Politics of Grandeur," a bid to secure his country's place among the leading nations of the globe. Under de Gaulle's direction, France acquired the atomic bomb, making it the world's fourth nuclear-armed state, and, in 1965, it joined the space race when it launched a satellite into orbit. Critics charged that the vast budgets given to these programs



would have been better spent within the economy at home; supporters, however, argued that, given France's turbulent and often shameful experiences during the previous 25 years, it was vital to restore the country's dignity by grand (though expensive) gestures. De Gaulle certainly took the dignity of his own office of state very seriously, often behaving more like a seventeenth-century monarch than a twentieth-century politician. He established the tradition of being a kind of elected king that has persisted throughout the Fifth Republic of the president.

In April 1969, following months of strikes and student protests across France—during which the young Jacques Chirac played a significant role in the negotiations—de Gaulle resigned the presidency. Little more than a year later he was dead of a sudden aneurysm. He had guided France through some of the worst years of its modern history and left his indelible mark on its postwar institutions. Now other men (and, in a few cases, women) would continue his legacy or challenge it.

CHAPTER

3

Chirac's Early Years

THE MAN WHO WOULD ONE DAY SUCCEED DE GAULLE TO BECOME THE fifth president of France's Fifth Republic was born Jacques René Chirac, in Paris, on November 29, 1932. His father, François, was originally a bank clerk who succeeded in business and eventually rose to become an executive in the Dassault aircraft company. Jacques grew up without siblings, for his sister died in infancy. This may have encouraged his anxious parents to be obsessively protective about their surviving child—according to one story, they insisted that all visitors to the family house wear white aprons to protect the young Chirac from germs. The household was certainly dominated by the shadow of the proud but strict paterfamilias, François, who indulged his son but also expected great things from him in return. Some political commentators have long speculated that Chirac's real reason for entering French public life was not ideology nor even selfish ambition, but rather a desperate need and desire to please his father.

In 1944, with Paris becoming a battleground, Jacques was evacuated to southern France to continue his schooling in relative peace. After the liberation he returned to the capital, attending the elite Lycée Carnot. Chirac was one of the first major political figures of the post-1945 period too young to have played any role in World War II. Although his career has been dogged by many other controversies, he has not had to explain away his wartime career in the same way that his predecessor François Mitterrand (who served in the Vichy government *and* the Resistance) had to do.

As a teenager, Chirac was summed up by one of his principals as hardworking "but often disorderd," with "a lively and curious mind but more spontaneous than reflective"—a conclusion that many of his critics would say captures the man exactly. His restless nature saw him embarking on several reckless escapades. When he was 17, Chirac secretly hitchhiked to the northern seaport of Dunkirk and joined the crew of a small coal ship, presuming to run away to sea. After three months of violent seasickness, however, he decided that a maritime life was not for him, and, sheepish after being met at the quayside by his father, he was whisked to Paris and sent back to school. Chirac developed other ways to rebel against his strict upbringing. He flirted with the idea of becoming a Communist (which was far from unusual in the Paris of the 1950s), selling the party newspaper L'Humanité on street corners and signing a Soviet antinuclear petition, which got him into trouble with his school authorities and would later bring him under suspicion while in the army. The young man had grown tall and handsome and he used his good looks to their best effect, hanging around the cafés and bars of Paris in a modish raincoat and broad-brimmed hat, with a cigarette permanently dangling out of his mouth. He dreamed of becoming a writer or sometimes a movie star.

Needless to say, François Chirac was having none of this, and by 1951 his son had been enrolled at the Institut d'Etudes

Politiques de Paris. This school, better known by its nickname Sciences-Po, is one of the so-called grands établissements (great schools) of France, a highly competitive and prestigious group of colleges similar in some ways to America's Ivy League. Anyone wishing to take part in a major political career in France, either in the higher ranks of government or in the civil service, must attend one or more of the grands établissements if they are to have a realistic chance of getting anywhere; conversely, attendance at such a school is almost a guarantee of a later job in public service. Chirac would eventually complete a graduate degree at another one of the grands établissements, the École Nationale d'Administration (ENA), becoming one of its elite énarques, as they are known—an alumni group notorious for their success and (supposed) arrogance. Certainly, he could have no better grooming for a life at the center of France's affairs of state.

Fate almost played Chirac a different hand, however. In 1953, the young man had the opportunity of attending summer school at Harvard, and he traveled to the United States for the first time. For Chirac, the would-be Hollywood actor, this was the culmination of a teenage dream, and the beginning of a strong lifelong attachment to les États-Unis, as America is known in France. He worked as a busboy and waiter in a Howard Johnson's restaurant in Cambridge, Massachusetts, acquiring fluent American English and developing a permanent taste for cold beer and hot turkey sandwiches. (In his personal tastes Chirac remains very "un-French"; instead of fine wines, nouvelle cuisine dining, and the ballet, he openly admits to a love of sumo wrestling, fish and chips, and Westerns.) While in Cambridge, he met and began dating a South Carolina heiress, Florence Herlihy, who used to pick him up after work in her white Cadillac convertible. The two seriously contemplated marriage, but their families both disapproved—and perhaps the lure of Paris and the political future awaiting him was too much for Chirac. Whatever the reason, he returned to France and shortly afterward became engaged to



In this August 1974 photograph, Jacques Chirac and his wife, Bernadette, watch as their daughter Claude shows off her equestrian skills on a Chirac family vacation in the countryside.

Bernadette Chodron de Courcel, the daughter of a minor aristocratic family with its own porcelain business. They have been married now for 50 years.

Chirac has always been intensely private about his family. Bernadette has been a loyal and largely self-effacing helpmate for half a century, spending much of her day-to-day life as the president's wife helping children's charities. The couple have two daughters, Laurence and Claude. Laurence trained as a doctor, but she is said to have suffered severely from anorexia nervosa. In 1988, she was badly injured in an apparent suicide attempt, after which time she has remained in seclusion from the outside world under the care of private nurses. Claude also shuns the limelight, but her important role as Chirac's personal assistant and public relations advisor is an open secret. She

choreographed her father's awkward performances in front of the TV cameras, making him appear less stiff and hesitant. She was the brainchild behind some of his more imaginative public events, such as his celebrated appearance onstage with Madonna at a concert in Paris in 1987. Claude has also known personal tragedy. In 1993, her husband, a journalist, committed suicide. She later decided to become a single parent, a decision which did not go down well with her socially conservative mother, with whom she reportedly does not get along. Until recently, it was not well known that the Chiracs also have an adopted daughter, Anh Dao Traxel, a former Vietnamese refugee who arrived in France in 1979. Chirac, who was by this time mayor of Paris, found her wandering bewildered through the corridors of Charles de Gaulle Airport and simply said to her: "Don't cry anymore, my dear. From now on, you will live with us." Given that Chirac is often accused of heartlessness and cynicism in his public life, this act of personal generosity won him much praise when it was revealed a few years ago, although some critics pointed out that it was typical of his passion for spontaneous and often reckless gestures.

Perhaps it was this native recklessness that encouraged Chirac to volunteer to go to Algeria in 1956 as a conscripted junior army officer. Military service was a requirement for all able-bodied men of his age, but with Chirac's influential family connections he could easily have avoided such a dangerous assignment (Chirac's story recalls the controversies that surrounded the Vietnam service of President George W. Bush and rival candidate John Kerry in the 2004 U.S. presidential election). Whether it was a spontaneous or a calculated decision, Chirac spent a year in Algeria and was wounded during his tour of duty. Despite his injury, he seems to have enjoyed the army life and seriously contemplated a professional military career, but he ultimately chose to return to his college studies once his term of service was completed. Part of the reason was probably the growing political crisis in France that would

eventually result in the collapse of the Fourth Republic. Chirac followed the dramatic events of the time closely and developed a profound admiration for General de Gaulle, verging almost on hero worship; service within the Gaullist ranks became his primary goal.

Initially when Chirac graduated from ENA in 1959, he went to work in the civil service. After three years, however, he attracted the notice of de Gaulle's prime minister, Georges Pompidou, and was recruited to serve as the head of the premier's personal staff. Chirac's dynamic energy and often ruthless determination to get the job done no matter the obstacles won him the nickname the Bulldozer. In 1967, Pompidou suggested that Chirac run for a National Assembly seat in the département of Corrèze in south-central France, a predominantly rural region that was the ancestral home of his family. Despite strong opposition—one of the other candidates was the brother of François Mitterrand, another rising star who had just stood unsuccessfully for the presidency against de Gaulle-Chirac won the seat and held it until 1995 when he himself became president. Corrèze was to be an important power base during his early political life. Chirac's rise through the corridors of power now became rapid. In 1968, he joined Pompidou's cabinet as deputy minister of economy and finance, working for Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, one of the up-and-coming leaders of the Gaullists. Then, in 1972, Chirac got his own ministry, this time agriculture and rural development. It was during this period that Chirac started to become well known among the French public as a whole, rather than just the narrow political class. He was described as one of the ambitious jeunes loups (young wolves) of French public life; he was even caricatured in the Astérix comic book series as "Prepostreous," a clever young go-getting Roman bureaucrat.

In 1974, d'Estaing became president and appointed Chirac, just 41 years old, his prime minister. This was a remarkable promotion for such a relatively young politician, but the expe-

rience proved bittersweet. The two men had fundamentally different views about the best way to tackle France's domestic and international problems, with Chirac in particular frustrated by the president's apparent unwillingness to address the country's unemployment and inflation crises. It did not help that d'Estaing and Chirac disliked each other at a personal level; the president sought every opportunity to belittle and humiliate his prime minister at cabinet meetings. After two years of this dysfunctional partnership, Chirac resigned his position—the first person ever to leave the premiership voluntarily during the Fifth Republic. Freed from the responsibilities of office, he established a brand-new political party, Rassemblement pour la République (Rally for the Republic, or RPR), a group that claimed to be the authentic voice of modern Gaullism. Chirac led the RPR until 1994 and, during that time, turned it into a powerful vehicle for his own political ambitions.

Using his newly created party to swift effect, in 1977, Chirac orchestrated his election as mayor of Paris. Given the capital's dominant position in French life, this is an important and highly visible public job that Chirac clearly intended as a launchpad to a presidential run. He won reelection to the mayor's office twice more and controlled Paris for the next 18 years. During his tenure as mayor, Chirac lobbied hard to have the Walt Disney Company build its first European theme park just outside Paris, despite strong opposition from critics who were worried that the "Americanization" of France was destroying national culture. Euro Disneyland (now called Disneyland Paris) finally opened in 1992 and has become one of the continent's most popular tourist sites, with 150 million visitors so far.

Other aspects of Chirac's legacy as mayor are less praiseworthy. He was condemned for running a corrupt administration in which patronage and kickbacks in the award of city contracts were endemic. Chirac's personal finances have also come under intense scrutiny, with claims that he used



In 1977, Chirac began his run for the mayoral seat of Paris. He would remain the mayor of Paris for 18 years.

public money to finance his constant trips abroad and his family's luxurious lifestyle. There have been other allegations of vote rigging and fraudulent electoral practices and the use of city workers as full-time campaigners for the RPR. A long-running judicial investigation into these accusations is currently stalled because, in 1999, France's supreme court, known as the Constitutional Council, decreed that the sitting president could not be prosecuted for acts preceding his election. This protection will, however, expire when Chirac leaves the presidency, which is one reason critics believe he is still hesitating about whether to make a second reelection bid in 2007.

Just four years after becoming Paris's mayor, Chirac ran for president. He was beaten by Mitterrand, and the winner made it clear that he held his opponent in little esteem: Chirac has "no personal convictions . . . it would be dangerous to put France in his hands," Mitterrand said. But, ironically, in 1986, the president had no choice but to invite Chirac to become his prime minister after the Gaullists won a narrow majority in the National Assembly. This "cohabitation" of rival politicians (which is explained more fully in the next chapter) lasted for two years, and though it was far from being an ideal arrangement, it did at least prove that the institutions of the Fifth Republic were strong enough to survive party differences. Chirac, however, found the experience just as frustrating as his first premiership under d'Estaing had been. He was able to introduce policies to curb the rise of unemployment, he began the privatization of France's many state-owned industries, and he cut taxes—including a wealth tax on the very rich, a decision that he later recanted as a mistake. But Chirac complained that Mitterrand exploited the powers of the presidency to stifle Chirac's initiatives, particularly in the realm of foreign affairs. In 1988, Chirac resigned his office to run a second time for president; for a second time, he was defeated. Trying to explain yet another failure to persuade the country's voters to support her husband, Bernadette Chirac famously remarked "maybe the problem is that the French just don't like him." Chastened, Chirac retreated back to Paris's City Hall.

In May 1995 came his third run. Now things were significantly different. Mitterrand, who had dominated French politics for almost 15 years, was no longer a candidate. In fact, he was suffering from advanced cancer of the prostate and would die just 8 months after leaving office. This left the door open for a competitive Gaullist challenge. Chirac saw off a bid by one of his colleagues, Édouard Balladur, and in the final ballot defeated the Socialist candidate, Lionel Jospin, although the margin of victory was a less-than-decisive 52 to 47 percent.

Nonetheless, Chirac's decades of ambition had paid off at last. As Paris erupted with the jubilant partying of his supporters, tooting car horns and brandishing the apple-tree campaigning symbol of the RPR, the newly elected president promised his supporters "fundamental change" now that he had finally attained the highest office of state. Change, however, would be easier to promise than to produce.

CHAPTER

4 The Politics of the Fifth Republic

ADOLPHE THIERS, A NINETEENTH-CENTURY HISTORIAN AND STATESMAN, SAID

that a republic was "the form of government that divides France least." The republic that Jacques Chirac was elected to lead in 1995 is France's fifth experiment with this form of representative rule. Before examining the specific policies that Chirac has attempted to introduce during his two terms as president, it would be useful to look more closely at the workings of the Fifth Republic he leads. This system of government bears some superficial resemblances to the constitutional arrangements of the United States, but there are also many important differences. It is also worth considering *why* France has needed five attempts to create a workable democratic settlement, and how the Fifth Republic's founder, Charles de Gaulle, attempted to solve the problems that had bedeviled the previous four.



Louis XVI stands in front of a guillotine in this 1793 print, *The Martyrdom of Louis XVI, King of France*. Louis XVI was convicted of treason and executed in 1793, ending absolute monarchy in France.

France's first republic emerged in 1792 from the revolutionary chaos that followed the collapse of the Bourbon dynasty of Louis XVI. Technically, it lasted until 1804, but long before then it had become a puppet of France's mastermind general Napoléon Bonaparte and his cronies. The First Republic is probably most famous for the "Reign of Terror" that lasted from September 1793 to July 1794, during which as many as 40,000 people were killed or executed, many by

the famous guillotine. The memory of the First Republic has long divided France. Some point to its grisly body count as an example of the folly of giving too much power to the masses. Others have chosen to stress the more constructive legacies of the revolutionary period, such as the Declaration of the Rights of Man (which laid out fundamental civil liberties in a similar fashion to the American Declaration of Independence) and the abolition of slavery in France's colonies in 1794. Nonetheless, fear of "Madame Guillotine" gave republicanism a reputation for violent excess that has long haunted France's history.

The Second Republic was proclaimed in 1848 when the last of France's kings, Louis-Philippe, was overthrown. The provisional government that replaced him declared universal male suffrage, but arguments quickly broke out between middleclass supporters of the Republic who wanted little government interference in the economy, and representatives of the workers who demanded welfare and employment assistance from the state. Seeing an opportunity amid the discord, Louis Napoléon, the general's nephew, used his famous name to good effect by running successfully for president. Three years later, he staged a coup d'etat and declared himself first dictator for life and then emperor, decisions that in both cases were ratified by popular referendums. This style of autocratic rule—appealing directly to the masses as a champion of national unity and order became known as Bonapartism. Elements of the Bonapartist method came naturally to the aloof General de Gaulle, and many see echoes of it today in the president's role in the Fifth Republic—some approving of the tradition, some not.

Louis Napoléon's empire was destroyed by war in 1870, and a Third Republic was declared in the aftermath of his defeat. This lasted for 70 years, and (unless de Gaulle's constitution survives until 2029) it is the longest lasting republic in French history. Despite this longevity, however, the history of the Third Republic was not a particularly happy one. In a reaction to the dangers of Bonapartism, the role of president was made

very weak and power rested with the legislature, known as the National Assembly. This might have been successful had France enjoyed a small number of well-disciplined political parties, but instead the Assembly was divided between feuding coalitions of many tiny splinter groups. Governments rose and fell rapidly, sometimes only lasting a handful of days before being forced to resign due to loss of support. This drained the country of strong and effective leadership and often left it floundering without any clear direction in times of crisis, most notably during the dark days of 1940 when the Germans conquered France with relative ease. One of the more enduring legacies of the Third Republic was its decision in 1905 to introduce strict separation of church and state, a policy known in France as *laïcité*. The Fifth Republic continues to abide by this separation, which has caused controversy in recent years because of the ban on the wearing of religious clothing and symbols in French public schools.

The Fourth Republic, which replaced the Vichy regime in 1946, was similar in its structure to the Third—inheriting all its problems—and, as has already been described, was wrecked in 1958 by disputes over France's colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria. The problem for de Gaulle and his constitutional advisors that year was how to learn from the failures of the previous republics and build a really workable democratic system for a country that had experienced too many types of government for its own good in the previous two decades. The essential dilemma was how to balance the office of the president against the National Assembly and avoid making either too weak or too strong. Too powerful a presidency left the country vulnerable to the danger of dictatorship; on the other hand, an overweening legislature might prove so divided that it was functionally incapable of governing anything. This balancing act was not unique to France, of course; all democratic states had had to address it at one time or another, but the French could not necessarily replicate the different solutions used elsewhere. In

DE GAULLE PROPOSED A SEMIPRESIDENTIAL SYSTEM IN WHICH THE DAY-TO-DAY RUNNING OF FRANCE WAS SPLIT BETWEEN A PRESIDENT AND A PRIME MINISTER.

the United States, for instance, the president has a great deal of executive authority over the federal government, but this is matched to some extent by the powers divested to the different states. France has always been highly centralized, with weak regional politics. In the United Kingdom, the Westminster Parliament holds the key to power, but the British have a tradition of well-organized political parties that only switch places occasionally, maintaining consistency in government. France's parties were (and still are) made up of relatively loose and fragile coalitions.

What de Gaulle proposed was a compromise: a semipresidential system in which the day-to-day running of France was split between a president and a prime minister. This remains the basis of the Fifth Republic's government today. The intention was to combine the best aspects of both offices while avoiding their pitfalls. Although certainly not without its critics or its practical difficulties, the Fifth Republic system has arguably been France's most successful democratic experiment to date.

France's president was originally nominated by an electoral college, but in 1962 de Gaulle successfully lobbied for this power to be given directly to the people in the form of a national referendum. The presidential election is held under a system called run-off voting, which can (and in practice always does) take place in two stages. In the initial round, voters cast their ballots for any one of the several candidates on the list—there were 16 initial candidates in the 2002 election, for instance. If one candidate gets more than 50 percent of the total



President Charles de Gaulle passionately delivers a tape-recorded speech to the French people on March 26, 1962. The presidential style he set has been adopted by his successors. With the political ideology known as Gaullism, de Gaulle's Fifth Republic has continued.

vote at this stage, then he or she automatically wins. If not, then the two candidates who got the highest percentage of votes go on to a second round in which they compete directly against each other. One of the quirks of this system is that if the initial ballots are split many ways, then a surprise fringe candidate can make it through to the second round—something that happened in 2002 when the far-right-winger Jean-Marie Le Pen came second to Chirac, much to the shock and dismay of many in France. Presidential elections originally occurred only once every seven years, something de Gaulle insisted upon in order to give the head of state stability in office; but in 2000 this was amended to a five-year term instead. Chirac is the first French

president affected by this change in the law, which is why his term will end in 2007 rather than 2009.

As in the United States, the legislature in France is divided into two houses, called the Senate and the National Assembly. Officially the Senate is the more senior of the two bodies; its 321 members are nominated to 9-year terms by the country's grands électeurs, mostly regional politicians, and their approval must be sought for any bill to become law. In practice, however, the National Assembly, the lower house, is dominant. It currently has 577 deputies representing constituencies across metropolitan and colonial France. They are each directly elected by universal suffrage, using a run-off system similar to that in presidential campaigns. There is normally a general election to the National Assembly every five years, unless the president dissolves the chamber before that time (one of his constitutional powers). Control of the National Assembly at any given time is decided by whichever coalition of parties can command a majority of deputies. For some years now, most mainstream parties have been grouped either with the conservative Gaullists or the left-wing Socialists, Communists, and Greens. The largest single party in 2006 is Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (Union for a Popular Movement, or UMP), which was formed in 2002 from a merger of Chirac's old RPR and other Gaullist groups.

The president chooses his prime minister from among the deputies in the National Assembly. However, while he can pick whomever he wishes, the Assembly has the power to force the prime minister to resign simply by passing a motion of censure. That means that in practice the president must choose someone who commands the favor of the majority of deputies. If his own coalition is in control, the decision is fairly straightforward. If it is not, then he faces the unpalatable decision of having to choose one of his political opponents, perhaps even someone who ran against him in the presidential race. This is called cohabitation. It has been one

of the unexpected products of the Fifth Republic's constitution, for de Gaulle never imagined that the public might vote in a National Assembly of a different political complexion from the current holder of the presidency. It took almost 30 years before the problem arose; Chirac was the first prime ministerial cohabiter when his rival Mitterrand appointed him to the office in 1986. Chirac found the experience so frustrating that he refused to take part when Mitterrand was faced with another cohabitation in 1993, and the Gaullist Edouard Balladur served as prime minister instead. But Chirac's encounter with cohabitation was far from over. In 1997, two years after he became president, he called legislative elections to try to increase the Gaullist majority; but the plan misfired disastrously when the left-wing coalition seized control of the Assembly. Chirac had no choice but to cohabit with Socialist leader Lionel Jospin for five awkward years.

The roles and powers of the president and prime minister depend to some extent on whether they are of the same party or are cohabiting. De Gaulle always envisaged the presidency as being a sort of elected monarchy—the Bonapartist tradition lingering on, though in a more democratic spirit. It is part of Gaullist ideology for the head of state to be a symbol of national unity, distancing himself from the sometimes grubby business of day-to-day politics and, instead, focusing on enhancing France's prestige and grandeur abroad. De Gaulle himself carried off this role to a tee and became a model for all his successors. As commander-in-chief of the armed forces and the recipient of all foreign ambassadors and visits by other international heads of state, the president has plenty of opportunity to play the role of king, particularly with the background of the magnificent eighteenth-century Élysée Palace, his official residence. He even has a royal role as the co-prince of Andorra, a tiny mountain state wedged between France and Spain. He is the grand master of the order of the Légion d'honneur, France's premier award of distinction.



Jacques Chirac shakes hands with Prime Minister Lionel Jospin in Paris on June 18, 1997. Chirac and Jospin cohabited for five years as a result of Chirac's decision to call legislative elections two years into his presidency.

If he has a prime minister sympathetic to his own political views, then the president can dominate the relationship, making all the important policy decisions and leaving his premier and the Council of Ministers (the group of government officials charged with specific areas of responsibility, such as the economy, defense, and education) with the more

mundane task of carrying out his programs. The prime minister in this situation is ultimately disposable and only holds office at the discretion of the president. He tends to act as the scapegoat for unpopular decisions, absorbing the blame when the voters turn against the government and often being forced to resign to assuage public anger. If there is a cohabitation in effect, on the other hand, the prime minister is much more of an equal to his head of state because he can direct legislation on his own terms, knowing that the president has little choice but to accept the situation for the time being. An unwritten constitutional convention has developed that, in times such as those, the president continues to control foreign and defense policy, leaving the prime minister to plan domestic affairs along his own party lines. Such a compromise emerged when Chirac was Mitterrand's prime minister from 1986 to 1988, with the president having little power to alter the Gaullist leader's privatization and tax-cutting schemes. Despite the veneer of cooperation, personal relations in a cohabitation remain tense for obvious reasons. There is often a good deal of barely disguised rancor; both Chirac and Mitterrand lost little opportunity in seeking to belittle the other.

Opinions differ as to whether cohabitation is a flaw in the Fifth Republic's constitution or an asset. Some see it as a recipe for political gridlock—Chirac has described it as a form of "paralysis"—and they claim that it is an inherently dangerous arrangement in times of crisis. Also, the personal ugliness that develops within the leadership diminishes the office of the president, which is supposed to exude a certain grand mystique. Others would argue that the Fifth Republic has survived three periods of cohabitation without any serious side effects, and that there is something to be said for forcing politicians of both sides to work together. Certainly the French voting public, which ultimately decides whether a cohabitation will take place, seems to have been rather keen on the institution during the last 20 years—almost half of

JACQUES CHIRAC

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which have been spent with a split government. With the presidential term now restricted to five years, however, elections to the presidency and the National Assembly will usually take place at the same time, which means less chance of one coalition winning one of the elections but not the other. It may be that Jacques Chirac is the last of France's presidents to have to suffer the indignity of cohabitation.

CHAPTER

5 Chirac and France's Social Problems

"CHANGE IS DIFFICULT," ADMITTED CHIRAC SHORTLY AFTER HIS ACCESSION to the president's office in 1995. But the Bulldozer made it clear that he intended to change France no matter the difficulty. "I was elected to restore and reinforce social cohesion in a country in crisis. I have seven years to do that." The centerpiece of Chirac's program for change was the French economy, which he alleged was on a fundamentally wrong track after a decade and a half of mismanagement by Mitterrand. Twice before in his career Chirac had tried to implement what he regarded as crucial economic reforms as prime minister, only to be thwarted by the interference of his president. Now, occupying the Élysée Palace himself, and with a strong Gaullist majority in the National Assembly, Chirac believed that his chance had come. The "social rift," which he claimed was tearing France apart, could finally be healed.

In 1995, France was—and continues to be today—one of the great economic powers of the world. It is a member of the G8, the exclusive club of the eight major industrial nations. It is a major exporter of goods across the globe, from high-tech computer equipment, chemicals, and pharmaceuticals to its trademark luxury wines and foods. Among the country's most famous businesses are its flagship airline Air France, the communications giant France Telecom, the carmaker Renault, and the electronics manufacturer Thales. France's natural beauty and historic landmarks make it one of the hubs of world tourism. It has an advanced road and rail network, a well-educated population with a high standard of living, and extensive trading links within and outside Europe—all key ingredients for sustained economic success. Why, then, did Chirac and many other critics of France's recent history claim in 1995 that the country faced an economic crisis?

The cancer they believed was eating away at France's prosperity was unemployment. When Chirac came to power, more than 3.3 million French people were out of work, about 12.5 percent of the able-bodied adult population, and the highest rate of any major developed nation. Such a soaring rate of joblessness was undesirable in its own right; the problem was concentrated mainly among the young, the economically disadvantaged, and members of ethnic minorities. It was creating permanent pockets of deprivation and resentment within France's towns and cities, whole communities of people alienated from the affluent mainstream—the "rift" that Chirac identified within French society. But in more immediate terms, unemployment was also having deleterious effects on other parts of the economy. The need to spend vast sums of money on welfare assistance to the unemployed was eating up tax revenues—France having one of the highest tax burdens in Europe—and causing a budget deficit of almost 70 billion francs, about 4 percent of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). For practical as well as moral reasons, then, Chirac's



Ten thousand demonstrators take to the streets of Paris on April 8, 1995, two weeks before the first round of the presidential elections. Members of labor unions, student associations, and social movements organized demonstrators to call for more definite platforms from presidential candidates regarding homelessness, unemployment, and racism.

supporters felt that urgent action was needed to cut the unemployment rate.

The long-term cause of this malaise, they argued, was the excessive interference in the workings of the economy by decades of French statesmen. Ever since the end of World War II, French economic planning had been dominated by the practice of *dirigisme* (direction)—the central planning and control of trade and industry by the state. France after 1945

never ceased to be a capitalist society, with most businesses in private hands. But the government had a far bigger role in the running of the day-to-day economy than was typical in most modern industrialized countries. The government operated the vital communications, power, and transport sectors, as well as owning in part or in whole important companies like the aircraft and weapons manufacturer Aérospatiale. It also used its legal powers to control the working and employment policies of private industry, encouraging behavior it thought desirable to the economy as a whole. French planners argued that dirigisme was a far more rational approach than the laissez-faire free-market system that had preceded it before World War II. It appealed to the logical mindset of the graduates of the grands établissements, many of whom found jobs in the growing state bureaucracy. It was sometimes claimed that through dirigisme France had found a "third way" of compromise between the extreme capitalism of the United States and the communism of the USSR, a sensible middle ground in which freedom to spend and accrue wealth was balanced with social responsibility.

During the three decades of the Trente Glorieuses, from 1945 to 1975, dirigisme delivered high growth rates, rising overall prosperity, and full employment. In these golden years, the booming economy allowed successive French governments to create generous welfare and social security programs; payouts were few, and so the state could offer lavish benefits without any financial consequences. After the mid-1970s, however, things began to go awry. There was a general slowdown in the world economy, caused in part by a very rapid rise in the cost of oil. France tried to adjust to this energy crisis by switching to nuclear power production—the country today generates about four-fifths of its electricity this way, the highest percentage in the world—but slower overall growth inevitably meant more difficult times for business. Unemployment began to rise, and it has remained a problem ever since. The extensive benefits

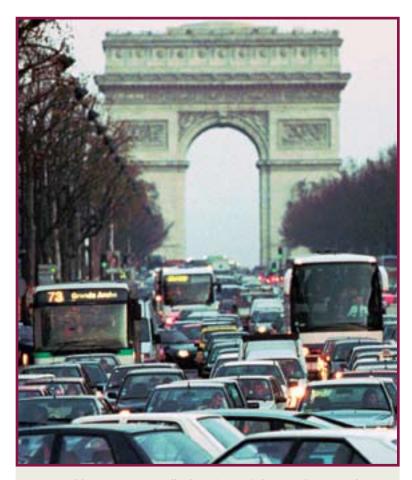
promised to the jobless in happier days now became a serious burden to the French treasury.

According to the Gaullists, the French government's continued meddling in economic life since the 1970s had actually made this situation worse than it had to be. Under French law, employers were heavily restricted from firing or laying off their employees. Disgruntled former workers could take their grievances to a tribunal, at which the employer faced the burden of proving that his decision was lawful rather (as in most countries) than the claimant having to prove that he or she had been unfairly dismissed. Given such legal headaches French business owners were very wary of hiring new workers, and so there was little incentive for job creation. Moreover, companies were required to provide their employees with a profuse array of benefits, ranging from a high minimum wage and a fat pension to a maximum workweek of 40 hours and generous sick and vacation time. From an employer's point of view, this raised personnel costs so high that many thousands of potential jobs were priced out of the market. This created a nation of haves and have-nots—a pampered majority with jobs who clung to their excessive legal protections and privileges regardless of the wider cost to society, versus an excluded minority who paid the price in perpetual unemployment. By selfishly feathering their own nests, French workers were living in a dreamworld that would leave their country incapable of competing in an increasingly globalized marketplace.

That, at least, was the view of the incoming Chirac government. Its opponents felt different about the situation. To them, the benefits and legal safeguards enjoyed by French workers were not indulgent fripperies, but rather hard-won rights that were the ordinary man or woman's only security against the callous and impersonal forces of capitalism. One did not solve unemployment by stripping away the entitlements of existing employees. They pointed to the successes of the unique French social model: the fact that France's

poverty rate was the lowest in the G8, and economic inequality among its citizens much less pronounced than elsewhere in the Western world. They accused Chirac and the Gaullists of wanting to impose *libéralisme* (liberalism) on France—this being a code word for the free-market, small-government philosophy linked in particular with the United States (where, ironically, the word *liberal* has the exact opposite connotations). In France, the label of ultralibéral is commonly used by the Left to attack politicians who want to change the country's economic policies or employment laws, and it has become so toxic an association that Gaullists frequently have to disassociate themselves from it: Chirac himself has gone so far as to say that "liberalism is as dangerous an ideology as communism." Nonetheless, it is clear that in 1995 his intention was to assail the unemployment problem in part by reducing government spending, privatizing selected state-owned industries, cutting state workers' pensions, and reforming the social security system—all methods that his critics would describe as "liberal."

Six months later, this austerity policy had made Chirac the most unpopular president in the history of the Fifth Republic. The problem was partly due to the poor choice of Prime Minister Alain Juppé, who was brash, arrogant, and uncharismatic, and later was convicted on embezzlement charges. But Chirac's real error was in underestimating the reaction of France's trade unions to his reform plan. Most French workers are not union members, but there is strong union representation of railroad and transportation employees, school and university teachers, and civil servants—groups which can, if they choose, cause major disruption to the country's economic life. All these groups are employed by the state, and French government jobs are among the most prized for their abundant benefits—so it is not surprising that such workers should have seen Chirac's plans as a direct threat to their own privileges.



Cars and buses create gridlock in front of the Arc de Triomphe on the Champs Élysées in Paris on November 28, 1995, the fifth day of a public transport strike.

What followed was a three-week general strike across France that paralyzed the nation and culminated in December in a series of protests attracting 2 million demonstrators. The tradition of direct action on the streets by "the masses" goes back to the French Revolution. On many occasions during the last two hundred years, the French people have felt obligated to march "to the barricades" in opposition to the sitting government. It is a principle of protest that the French feel is

particularly theirs, and it haunts the nation's historical consciousness in a way that is unknown in, say, the United States. Chirac was very familiar with the largest such demonstration in the history of the Fifth Republic, the series of strikes and protests by students and union workers that rocked France in May and June of 1968, which ultimately led to the downfall of de Gaulle's government a year later. At the time he had been working in Prime Minister Pompidou's Ministry of Economics and Finance, and he had been a member of the government team that successfully negotiated an end to the strikes with the leaders of the demonstrators. Now 27 years later the "Spirit of '68" was alive and well on France's streets.

The momentum of the protests eventually subsided at the beginning of 1996, and Chirac, pressing ahead with his reforms, appeared to have survived the crisis. But his overconfidence was rudely shattered in April 1997 after he dissolved the National Assembly early, calling a surprise general election, the first time any president of the Fifth Republic had done so. Chirac believed that his austerity measures were proving so successful that the time was ripe to increase the Gaullist majority in the Assembly, and so enhance his mandate for radical economic changes. Instead, the result was disastrous: His coalition's advantage was wiped out and the left wing seized control of the Assembly. Chirac had no choice but to appoint the Socialist leader Lionel Jospin as prime minister: France was back to cohabitation once again. What went wrong? To some degree, it was a matter of propriety. By appearing to manipulate his constitutional powers in order to gain a short-term advantage against his rivals, Chirac had come across as "unpresidential," a major sin for a Gaullist, who was after all supposed to be somewhat aloof from party politics. Most significant, however, was the voting public's use of the election as a referendum on Chirac's "liberalism." Clearly the president had gravely underrated the opposition to his economic plans. For the remaining five years of his first term, with his rival Jospin

as his prime minister, Chirac had no choice but to rein in his bold reforms: Healing the "social rift" would have to wait. Even though Chirac subsequently won reelection in 2002 and was able to rid himself of Jospin (something that will be discussed in the next chapter), many observers would say that the crucial momentum lost in 1997 ended any possibility of a genuinely radical program of change during his presidency.

That is not to say that Chirac did not try. In May 2005, the president nominated Dominique de Villepin as his new prime minister. De Villepin, who had previously served in the Foreign and Interior ministries, was unabashedly in favor of liberal economic reforms, in particular of the country's labor laws. Shortly after entering office, he introduced new legislation that watered down the contractual guarantees of employment required by small business owners, in order to make it easier to fire workers—and, it was claimed, make it less of a burden to hire them in the first place. Emboldened by the success of this scheme, de Villepin extended it in January 2006 to cover the first employment contract of young workers—the contrat première embauche (CPE). The new CPE removed the burden-of-proof requirement from employers who wanted to lay off workers under 26 years old during the first two years of their service. De Villepin argued that with France suffering a 23 percent unemployment rate among young people, it was more vital than ever to loosen the excessively restrictive ties that bound potential employers from offering jobs to first-time workers. However, he did not count on the intense resistance offered up by French youths, especially students, who claimed that the CPE amounted to a "Kleenex Contract"—a means for companies to discard their young employees like used tissue paper at their whim. In March, half the universities across France closed because of student strikes, and one-and-a-halfmillion protestors took to the streets. In some cities, violent confrontations took place between demonstrators and police, with cars and shops vandalized and tear gas used to disperse



Dominique de Villepin speaks at the National Assembly in Paris on July 5, 2005. The prime minister stated his mission to reduce France's unemployment rate, garnering criticism from France's youth, who called his proposed law a "Kleenex Contract."

the crowds. All this was taking place just a few months after the riots that followed the deaths of Zyed Benna and Bouna Traore. Under the circumstances, it is hardly surprising that Chirac was in no mood for further street confrontation. Three days after the largest of the demonstrations, he gave a national address explaining that, while he was still a supporter of the law, he would request its modification. In fact, the following month his government abandoned the CPE entirely. The affair left Chirac's public standing even lower than before and damaged de Villepin's hopes of a 2007 presidential run—perhaps fatally.

In the last months of Chirac's second term, then, how does his record on the economy stand? In many respects, France has not fared too badly during the Chirac years. Its growth rate remains relatively stable, if much less spectacular than the heady days of the Trente Glorieuses. Inflation is not a serious problem. Trade continues to grow. But the unemployment rate, while slightly down, continues to hover between 9 and 10 percent, much higher than that of neighboring European countries, and the government's spending deficit remains as high as ever. Chirac's administration has by no means been an economic disaster for France, but his self-proclaimed mission to convert his countrymen to the virtues of a leaner, more competitive economy has largely failed. Libéralisme remains a dirty word for the majority of the French, and one that Chirac himself has to avoid scrupulously. Although supporters of the status quo applaud their defense of workers' rights, critics grumble that the country continues to prefer a sugarcoated fantasy to the starker realities of the world economy, an evasion of unpleasant facts that they will one day have to face. Either way, Chirac himself admitted in 1995 that "you can't change France without the French," and the French have proven unwilling or unable to change very much.

CHAPTER

France's Racial and Religious Problems

ON JULY 12, 2006, PRESIDENT CHIRAC ATTENDED A SOLEMN CEREMONY in the cobblestone courtyard of France's École Militaire, one of the country's elite military academies. Chirac was there to atone publicly for the sins of the French state over a century earlier. The subject of his contrition was Captain Alfred Dreyfus, a talented and deeply patriotic young artillery officer who had been falsely accused of treason by the Third Republic. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment on the harsh penal colony of Devil's Island, off the coast of South America. Dreyfus was Jewish, and he was seen by his superiors as a convenient and disposable scapegoat for the spying of other officers, even though evidence of his personal innocence had quickly become apparent. During the four years that he spent on Devil's Island, Dreyfus became the subject of a passionate campaign by his

supporters to correct the injustice and expose the rampant anti-Semitism of the Third Republic's military and civil elite. It was a controversy that for some time tore France apart, permanently estranging friends and relatives who found themselves in opposite camps. In 1899, the then president pardoned Dreyfus, who was released from prison, and in 1906 a military commission formally exonerated him of all charges. One hundred years to the day that that exoneration was announced, Chirac addressed the modern-day cadets of the École at which Dreyfus had been stripped of his rank, describing the wronged man as "an exemplary officer" and a "patriot who passionately loved France."

Chirac's reemphasis of Dreyfus's innocence and his repentance for the bigotry of his predecessors was not just a matter of dry historical curiosity. It has long been alleged that France has never really acknowledged its long and inglorious history of anti-Semitism, most notoriously its cooperation in the deportation and execution of French Jews during the Holocaust. Today, France has more than 600,000 Jewish residents, the largest such population in Europe, more than half of whom live in the Paris area. While official anti-Semitism is no longer tolerated as it was at the time of Dreyfus, incidents of antagonism and hatred toward the country's Jews have nonetheless continued to take place. In recent years, there has, some claim, been a disturbing acceleration of the problem. Jewish cemeteries and schools have been vandalized and defaced with swastikas and other Nazi regalia, and synagogues and community centers destroyed in arson attacks. In 2002, the statue of Dreyfus in the center of Paris had "dirty Jew" daubed on it with paint. And in February 2006, France was shocked when Ilan Halimi, a young Jewish man, was kidnapped, tortured, and killed by a criminal gang, an incident that, although ostensibly an attempt at extortion, bore many hallmarks of being racially motivated. What made Halimi's murder all the more troubling and tragic was that it was committed by Muslim immigrants, members of a



Chirac's acknowledgment of France's unfair treatment of Alfred Dreyfus *(above)* addressed the country's long history of anti-Semitism. Still, incidents of racially motivated violence and antagonism have continued to be a problem.

community that has suffered its own share of deprivation and injustice in recent times, but which is accused of venting its frustrations through acts of violent anti-Semitism. France's racial and religious divisions have become all the more protracted during the last 20 years, partly as a result of the changing demographic character of the country. Chirac saw the

reduction of these tensions as part of his presidential mission on coming to power in 1995. As with his attempts to solve France's economic woes, however, his record on race relations while in office has been decidedly mixed.

Until 1945, France was, with the exception of its Jewish population, a largely homogenous society of white, nominally Catholic citizens. For many decades, however, it had experienced a stagnant birthrate, and after the mass casualties of two world wars it was feared that the country could simply not produce a large enough population to fulfill all its future manpower needs. One response to this was a series of "natalist" laws encouraging French parents to have as many children as possible through subsidies, tax incentives, and generous childcare provision. This led to a boom in the fertility rate that made France the postwar European country with the second-highest naturally occurring increase in population, only slightly lower than Ireland's. Such a long-term incremental growth, however, could not resolve the more immediate problem of a serious labor shortage, so France turned to a simpler alternative: immigration. From the 1960s onward, large numbers of young men from its former colonies in North Africa, particularly Algeria, and later from sub-Saharan Africa and Turkey, were encouraged to come to France to take largely unskilled or semiskilled manual employment. In time, these migrant workers were joined by other family members and settled communities developed, clustered in particular in suburban housing projects (known in France as HLMs—habitations à loyer modéré) surrounding the nation's cities. From the 1980s onward, new immigration laws reduced the primary inflow of migrants to a trickle, although illegal entry into the country continued.

It is very difficult to assess accurately how the decades of non-European immigration into France have influenced its demographic makeup today. This is in part because firstgeneration immigrants have now been joined by their children and grandchildren, all of whom were born on French soil but



Residents of a community housing project in an eastern suburb of Paris go about their daily life on September 1, 2005. These communities are largely inhabited by immigrant unskilled laborers and are contributing to the social divide in Paris.

who culturally still continue to identify themselves as non-French. Also, there has been much population movement inside Europe during the last half century. It has been estimated that about one in four men and women living in France have at least one parent who was born in another country, but the majority of these are from neighboring European states such as Spain and Italy. About 3 million residents are either from (or are members of families that derive from) North Africa, and another 700,000 hail from sub-Saharan Africa. Altogether it is believed that there are about 4 million Muslims in France out of a total population of slightly more than 60 million, although what percentage of these are serious practitioners of their faith is unknown.

These large ethnic and religious minorities have been described as the people of the *banlieues*—the outskirt slums.

It was originally hoped that, with the passage of time, their children would gradually assimilate into mainstream French society, erasing economic and social differences, but that has largely not happened. They remain segregated, poor, and alienated, with unemployment reaching as high as 40 percent in places. Crime is often rampant on the HLM estates, and relations with the authorities, particularly the police, are usually bad. This estrangement burst forth in late 2005 with the riots in Clichy-sous-Bois and elsewhere across France, but these were far from unprecedented disturbances; similar conflicts between immigrant youths and police had been taking place on a smaller scale for many years. Sympathizers argue that France's minorities are the victims of systematic racism and neglect, and that the answer to their woes lies in a more conciliatory government attitude and an increased willingness to invest in their demoralized communities. Critics respond that because of their unwillingness to be absorbed into French society, the immigrants have brought many of their own troubles on themselves, and that by their tolerance for violence, illegality, and disorder they are perpetuating their own misery.

The problems of France's ethnic and religious minorities have become a major issue in the country's public life. Some politicians have been accused of manipulating these tensions by playing on the fears of the mainstream electorate for cynical advantage at the polling station. Chirac himself was charged with this in June 1991 when, as mayor of Paris, he made a notorious speech attacking the "noises and smells" of Arab and black families, suggesting that they were disruptive of French society and that the country was suffering from an "overdose" of immigrants. More recently, Chirac's minister of the interior, Nicolas Sarkozy, has been condemned for what opponents call his pandering to the prejudices of middle-class voters. Sarkozy's responsibilities at the Interior Ministry include maintaining law and order, and he has taken a tough stance on crime that has included an aggressive policing policy in the immigrant banlieues. Critics allege that

his crackdowns on vagrancy, prostitution, and the drug trade have infringed civil liberties and are more about bolstering his possible run for the presidency in 2007 with media-friendly stunts than a serious attempt at reducing criminality. His provocative attitude toward immigrants was, it is claimed, partly to blame for the incident in Clichy-sous-Bois that set off the 2005 riots. Shortly before the street disturbances broke out, he had already made an inflammatory speech about the slum "rabble," promising that "we're going to get rid of them for you." Most notoriously of all, he suggested cleaning out one banlieue "with a Kärcher," a type of high-pressure water hose.

If any one man has exploited the latent anxieties of the French masses to his own advantage, however, it is Jean-Marie Le Pen, founder and president of the National Front (Front National, or FN) Party. Le Pen is a former paratrooper who served in the colonial wars in Indochina and Algeria—where, it was later alleged, he took part in war crimes—and who was drawn into politics during the late 1950s. In 1972, he founded the FN, which became an increasingly influential vehicle for his personal blend of right-wing populism. Le Pen has led a tempestuous and violent life for a politician. He lost an eye when he was brutally attacked during an early election campaign; then in 2003, he was stripped of his seat in the European Parliament when he himself was accused of assaulting another candidate. He has made many remarks that have been interpreted as openly racist and anti-Semitic, dismissing the Holocaust as "just a detail" of history and suggesting that Chirac is in the secret pay of Jewish organizations. His party takes an uncompromisingly right-wing line on France's social and political problems. He believes in the reinstatement of the death penalty, the criminalization of abortion, the return of women to the home from the workforce, and he regards gay culture as an "aberration." More controversially still, Le Pen has argued at various times that carriers of the AIDS virus should be compulsorily detained in sanatoriums, and that

millions of Muslim immigrants should be forcibly deported from France. His opponents have condemned him as a neo-Fascist, a procreator of the values of Vichy, and his party as a haven for racists and anti-Semites. Le Pen has responded that France's mainstream parties are all dishonest, and that he alone has the true interests of his countrymen at heart—a counterclaim that, sincere or not, has had a ring of truth for some ordinary voters given the large number of corruption scandals in Chirac's administration.

Le Pen first stood for the presidency in 1974, and he has done so on many occasions since, never receiving more than a small minority of votes. In 2002, however, and much to the astonishment of France's political commentators, the peculiarities of the Fifth Republic's constitution catapulted him into a direct face-off with Chirac. The Socialist candidate Lionel Jospin, Chirac's cohabiting prime minister, was widely expected to be the main challenger to the Gaullists that year. But the left-wing vote was split because of multiple candidates, and Le Pen edged out Jospin to come in second with 16.86 percent of the ballot. This meant that under the run-off system it would be Le Pen, and not Jospin-who, humiliated, immediately announced his retirement from politics—who would go into the second round against the sitting president. To many people in France, the thought that an extremist like Le Pen could be a serious challenger for the country's highest office was appalling and an international embarrassment. On May 1, a week after the first electoral round, almost half a million people demonstrated in Paris against the FN leader, with banners saying: "I'm ashamed to be French." The defeated Socialists advised their supporters that, however much they detested Chirac, it was necessary to support him in the second round for the sake of the Republic: "Vote for a crook, not a fascist!" became the slogan of the Left. For the president, who had been expecting a tough fight against Jospin, the unlikely result was something of a godsend because it virtually guaranteed his reelection despite his acute personal



A crowd of thousands demonstrates against far-right presidential candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen in southern France on May 2, 2002. Le Pen's strong stances make him a polarizing figure in France; many French people claim his candidacy is a national embarrasment.

unpopularity across the country. Chirac won the runoff comfortably with more than four-fifths of the vote.

It is difficult to say at this early stage what significance, if any, the surprise events of the 2002 election had. To some extent, Le Pen's accomplishment was a freak of the voting laws, just as the razor-thin margin of victory in the 2000 U.S. presidential race revealed some of the weaknesses of America's electoral college system. Jospin's failure had more to do with divisions

within his Socialist camp than with any genuine groundswell of support for Le Pen's policies. Critics of the FN can take some consolation from the fact that its candidate received less than 18 percent of the final vote. On the other hand, others might say that a country in which a man with Len Pen's views can receive almost one vote in five is not a country with a healthy racial and religious atmosphere. The Le Pen phenomenon is in that sense a litmus test for the worrisome divisions within French society.

If the 2002 election drama temporarily united Gaullists and Socialists, other issues concerning the place of immigrants in modern French society have split the parties in far more unexpected ways. Probably the best example is France's law banning the wearing of head scarves and other religious symbols by children in public schools, which came into effect in September 2004. For more than one hundred years, the French state has had a strict policy of laïcité, or secularity, and this is enshrined in the opening clause of the Fifth Republic's constitution. There are similarities between laïcité and the separation of church and state found in the United States, but the French government has traditionally had a much stricter and more aggressive definition of that separation than that in America. It has been said that whereas the U.S. government chooses to stand apart from religion, the French state actively *opposes* it. This is because of the rivalry that traditionally existed between the Catholic Church and the Republic, two powerful institutions that have often come to blows during their history. In recent years, the passion that once drove this conflict has largely ebbed away, but a new religious tension has replaced it: that between the French state and Islam.

Many Muslim parents insist that their daughters must wear head scarves when out in public. The wearing of such items of clothing in France's state schools was largely tolerated, if not encouraged, for a long time, but as the practice began to increase during the 1990s, there were calls for it to be banned as a violation of laïcité. Where the law stood on this matter was not clear, however, so in July 2003, Chirac set up an investigative committee to examine and clarify the problem. It published its report that December, recommending that any "conspicuous" wearing of religious items in schools infringed on the principle of secularity. A law was duly promulgated enforcing the ban. There were protests from Muslims that this was an attack on their civil rights, but all the mainstream parties supported the new law, including the Socialists, because the Left in France has traditionally put great stock in the importance of laïcité. The one party that opposed the law was Le Pen's National Front—because under the revised regulations schoolchildren would also be forbidden to wear crucifixes or other Christian symbols, and the FN saw that as harassment of traditional French religious culture. Even more ironically, some Muslim parents responded to the head scarf ban by removing their children from state education and placing them in private fee-paying Catholic schools, which are far more tolerant of the use of the head scarf and other symbols of Islam.

After the 2005 riots, Chirac reminded his people that the rioters of the banlieues were, above all, "sons and daughters of the Republic," and that their frustrations over the "poison" of racism had to be addressed. "We are all aware of discrimination," the president went on. "How many resumes are thrown in the waste paper basket just because of the name or the address of the applicant?" Throughout 2006, he was at pains to make symbolic concessions on this theme. He repealed an earlier law which insisted that schools teach about the positive aspects of French colonialism. He declared May 10 to be a national anniversary commemorating the victims of slavery. In June, he unveiled the first monument to Muslim soldiers who died at the World War I battle of Verdun in 1916. These were significant conciliatory gestures. But ultimately France's immigrant problems will only be eased by profound socioeconomic development in the quartiers difficiles. Chirac has evidently missed his opportunity to introduce those kind of changes.

CHAPTER

Chirac and the European Union

IN EARLY JULY 2005, PRESIDENT CHIRAC VISITED KALININGRAD, A RUSSIAN

city on the Baltic coast, to meet with that country's president, Vladimir Putin, and German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder. During that week much French attention was centered on the announcement of the winning bid for the 2012 Olympic Games, which would be made a couple of days later. It was strongly expected that a European city would be chosen, and Paris, which has not hosted a summer games since 1924, was one of the hot contenders vying for the bid alongside London. Many French people were quietly confident that this time the Olympics would be theirs. Given the tense rivalry between Paris and London, this was a moment in which any diplomatic blunder might have embarrassing implications; so it was unfortunate that Chirac decided to make a few

"light-hearted" observations about British food to his fellow statesmen that were overheard by journalists and reported around the world. "One cannot trust people whose cuisine is so bad," said Chirac. "The only thing they have ever done for European agriculture is mad cow disease," he added, referring to the deadly neurological infection BSE that was first detected in UK cattle. Chirac went on to say that "after Finland, [Britain] is the country with the worst food"—a particularly poor choice of words in the circumstances, given that two of the members of the International Olympics Committee (IOC) deciding on the 2012 bid were Finns. On July 6, much to the dismay of Parisians, it was announced by the IOC that London had edged out Paris to take the games. It is highly unlikely that Chirac's comments had any serious influence on the decision, which had probably been made long before his Kaliningrad gaffe. Nonetheless, to many Frenchmen their president had come across as foolish and unsportsmanlike, and it added to their long-standing suspicion that he was clueless in his dealings with his fellow members of the European Union (EU).

Europe, indeed, has been a consistent bugbear of an issue for Chirac. He has taken so many positions on the EU, both for and against, that he has been nicknamed Chameleon Bonaparte and La Girouette (the weather vane). His critics claim that he switches from being pro-European to anti-European and then back again purely on the basis of what seems politically expedient at the time. In the late 1970s, he was an unabashed critic of European unification, lambasting his more Euro-friendly colleagues on the Right as sellouts who wanted to hand over French independence to foreign governments. Yet in 2005, he staked his presidential fortunes on a "yes" vote in the national referendum on the proposed new EU constitution, a document that had far more radical implications for French sovereignty than anything ever proposed before. When the constitution was rejected by 55 percent of the voters, it was seen as a major personal defeat for Chirac, and (at least until the banlieue riots



Although the city of Paris made a strong bid to host the 2012 Olympics, the honor went to longtime rival London. Chirac's critics blamed the loss on the president's careless remarks about British cuisine, which journalists overheard and reported worldwide.

in November) a new low point for his presidency. But, then, many of his predecessors at the Élysée have had an equally difficult time coming to terms with the EU and what it means for France and the Fifth Republic.

The European Union began life with the much humbler name of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), founded in 1951 by France, Italy, West Germany, and the three Benelux countries: Belgium, the Netherlands, and Luxembourg. It was intended to be a pooling of the member states' industrial raw materials so that none of them could ever go to war with any of the others again. Twice during the twentieth century all six countries had been involved in bitter conflicts that had

killed millions and devastated their economies. By the end of the decade, the ECSC had proven so successful that it was decided to take the idea a stage further and create a "common market" of goods, services, and labor within Western Europe, providing the continent's states with a free-trade zone in which they could compete on equal terms. The European Economic Community (EEC), as it was then known, was signed into law by the Treaty of Rome in 1957. Again, France was a founding member.

De Gaulle was initially skeptical about the desirability of the EEC, fearing that it would compromise France's freedom of independent action as a world power. Deciding, however, that the EEC was inevitable, he resolved to make sure that it was dominated by his own country. France's traditional rival, Germany, was not a serious obstacle to this because at the time it was still divided in half, the west a capitalist democracy and the east a Communist dictatorship. A more serious contender was Great Britain, which had the population and economic resources to overshadow France. De Gaulle made it his business throughout his presidency to veto Britain's persistent attempts to join the EEC. The UK was only permitted to enter in 1973 after de Gaulle was dead.

As a result of France successfully retaining dominance of the EEC, many of its institutions were molded with French interests in mind. Perhaps the most important of these was—and remains—the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP). This is a subsidy program for farmers in member states, providing minimum prices for their produce at levels consistently above that which would normally be found in the marketplace. It currently eats up about 44 percent of the total EU budget, and it has been heavily criticized by some member nations as a form of what would be called in the United States "pork barrel" spending—an expensive sop to agricultural interests rather than a rational economic policy that benefits everyone. France, which for a modern industrialized country still has an

unusually large amount of land under the plow and a significant proportion of its population working on small holdings in the countryside, benefits hugely from the CAP, getting more than one-fifth of all the EU's subsidies. Its existence has proven to be a big stumbling block in trade negotiations with the United States and other world powers, which are excluded from the European market by the supposedly unfair advantage that EU farmers receive. French politicians defend the system as a means of community rights, however. They argue that traditional peasant culture could not survive without the artificial support of the CAP, and that without it small farms that have been passed down in the same family's hands for generations would be unsustainable and would have to be sold to large corporate businesses.

Chirac's early attitude toward the EEC was complicated. The Corrèze region that he represented in the National Assembly was heavily rural, and it is not surprising that he was therefore a supporter of the CAP—indeed, he complained that the policy was not beneficial *enough* to France's farmers. However, he also wanted to distinguish himself from his rivals on the Right, and one of the ways of doing that was to be more critical of the EEC than they were. Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the president from 1974 to 1981, for whom Chirac briefly served as prime minister in a notoriously unfriendly partnership, was passionately pro-European. The party he eventually formed, the Union for French Democracy (Union pour la Démocratie Française, or UDF), argued in favor of a federal Europe in which central power would be greatly strengthened at the expense of the member governments. D'Estaing spoke at times about the potential for a "United States of Europe" with a common government, foreign, and defense policy. Therefore, after Chirac broke with d'Estaing in 1976, his rhetoric became as anti-European as the president's was pro. In December 1978, shortly before the first elections to the EEC's Parliament, Chirac issued a famous pamphlet known as the Call of Cochin, named after the hospital in Paris that he was staying in at the time while recovering from a traffic accident. In the Call of Cochin, Chirac called the UDF the "party of the foreigners" and suggested that they were acting against the best interests of France, undermining the country's sovereignty in the service of an over-mighty European Economic Community. He established himself as one of the leading critics of the drift toward federalism, a group later to be known as the Eurosceptics.

At the time, such Euroscepticism was not a particularly successful strategy to adopt in France, and it proved a disappointing source of votes for Chirac's RPR. French voters could see plenty of practical self-interest in keeping the EEC strong, not only because of the financial rewards from schemes like the CAP but also because, as the foremost member-state, France enjoyed a boost in prestige from its dominant role. (Britain was also a member by this time, but its people and government were never more than lukewarm about the EEC and did not much try to interfere with France's control.) Things began to change in the early 1990s, however. The first challenge was Germany's reunification after the ending of the Cold War. Now the united German state had by far the largest population and economy in Europe, and it had the potential to use the EEC to its own favor and to squeeze out France from its traditional leadership position. The French electorate was split about how to respond to this. Some argued that the best way of restraining the new German state was to push ahead with federalism, stripping away national powers in favor of a European government. Many, however, thought that it was now time for France to assert a greater sense of independence from the rest of the continent. This shift toward Euroscepticism was reflected in the very narrow margin of victory that French voters gave the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, an agreement that turned the EEC into the EU and strengthened its economic and political institutions. In 1991, 70 percent of French people who were polled thought that the European Union was a good thing for their

country. By 1995, this had slipped to 53 percent, and by 1997 just 47 percent were willing to speak in favor of the EU.

Opposition to Europe is not the exclusive preserve of any French political party or ideology. The mainstream Gaullist and Socialist movements have remained more or less pro-European, though with wavering enthusiasm, for many years. But the extreme Right and Left are opposed, though for different reasons. Le Pen's National Front objects to the EU's stripping away of French sovereignty, and it argues that the removal of barriers to migration between member states has helped keep unemployment high by allowing into the country too many foreign competitors for work. During the 2005 referendum campaign, the specter of the "Polish plumber" was used by Eurosceptics as a symbol of the Eastern European immigrants supposedly stealing away well-paying manual jobs from French workers. The Communists and Greens insist that the EU is a form of creeping libéralisme that has stripped away employment rights under the guise of free trade. They believe that France's "social model" cannot survive alongside EU legislation. French liberals agree with this, of course—the difference being that they regard the end of dirigisme as a good thing rather than bad.

The big European issue that Chirac had to confront when he became president was that of the planned single currency. The Maastricht Treaty had committed the EU to the creation of the euro, a monetary unit that would be used by all member countries in order to streamline financial and trade transactions between them. By 1995, Chirac had come a long way from the days of the Call of Cochin, and he had been converted to the virtues of federalism and greater economic unity. His government became a strong supporter of the push to create the euro, which was officially rolled out at the beginning of 1999 and which became the standard physical currency of most EU member states (with a few exceptions, notably Britain) in 2002. Although his successful husbandry of the euro could be called



French finance minister Dominique Strauss-Kahn holds a press conference to discuss the euro on December 31, 1998. The conversion from the franc to the euro created much controversy in France.

one of Chirac's most enduring achievements while president, it did not come without cost and controversy. The end of the franc after centuries of use was an emotional issue for many French people, transcending mere economic policy to touch on matters of the country's culture and traditions. The National Front maintains a campaign to return France to its former unit of currency, though this has not convinced a plurality of voters, as yet anyway. A more practical problem of adopting the euro has been the handing over of monetary policy to the European Central Bank in Frankfurt, Germany. Since France can no longer set its own currency interest rates, its government has to keep much tighter reins on its budget and is not able to spend large sums on job creation schemes, for instance. While

French liberals applaud this as a way of forcing politicians to behave more responsibly with the public's money, it has given the Chirac administration less leverage in its fight against unemployment. Needless to say, this has been seized upon by Eurosceptics as one of the evils of federalism.

Although the EU is undoubtedly a more powerful institution now than it was when Chirac became president, France's rejection of its constitution in 2005 effectively killed off that project and ended moves toward greater federalism for the time being. The big European issue for the next decade is less likely to involve attempts to strengthen the EU's control of national governments, but rather the future scope of its membership. Before the Maastricht Treaty, the only additions to the original six-member club of the ECSC had been from western and southern Europe—Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Greece, Portugal, and Spain—and these extensions had been at a fairly stately pace over several decades. In 1995, however, Austria, Finland, and Sweden were added, and with the Cold War now over the former members of the Eastern European Warsaw Pact were vying for inclusion. In 2004, 10 new members were allowed to join, including Poland and the Czech Republic; between 2007 and 2008, Bulgaria and Romania have also been given the goahead to enter. How far can Europe spread east? Could Ukraine (which has openly expressed an interest) ever become an EU state? And if Ukraine, why not Russia—which would raise the dizzying prospect of the EU's borders stretching all the way to Vladivostok on the Pacific Coast.

Then there is the question of Turkey, perhaps the trickiest challenge of all. Turkey meets many of the standard economic and political criteria for entry, but it would be the first Muslim member of what has up till now been an exclusively Christian club. Some critics suggest that this would prove an implacable cultural barrier. Moreover, Turkey's population size would make it the second-largest member after Germany and would allow the possibility of unrestricted immigration into Western

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Europe—something that France in particular, with its turbulent ethnic divisions, is greatly concerned about. Chirac has expressed support for the Turkish candidacy, but given the slow pace of negotiations it is unlikely to be his problem to deal with. Perhaps, after the crushing defeat of the constitution in 2005, that is a relief to him—particularly as his position on the world stage has recently been complicated by events outside of Europe, most notably by the Global War on Terror and the conflict in Iraq.

CHAPTER

Chirac and the Global War on Terror

JUST BEFORE NOON ON CHRISTMAS EVE, 1994, AN AIR FRANCE JET AIRLINER prepared to leave Algiers, the capital of Algeria, for the short flight back to Charles de Gaulle Airport in Paris. Many of its 220 passengers were returning home to France to spend the Christmas holidays with their families. Shortly before the planned takeoff, four men disguised as airport workers revealed that they were carrying automatic weapons and announced that they were taking over the aircraft. They were members of the Groupe Islamique Armé, or GIA, an Islamist terror organization dedicated to overthrowing the Algerian government and turning the country into a fundamentalist Muslim state similar to that of the Taliban's Afghanistan. Although the GIA's main area of operations was in its own homeland, the group resented the support that France



On December 26, 1994, French police storm the Air France plane that was hijacked by four Algerian terrorists from the Groupe Islamique Armé. Like the leaders of England and the United States, Chirac has taken a hard line against terrorism.

provided to the Algerian state, and it was determined to exact vengeance on the former colonial power. A two-day standoff between the Algerian authorities and the kidnappers ensued until, after several of the hostages had been killed, the plane was allowed to leave Algiers and head toward France. The flight was diverted to the southern port of Marseilles, where the GIA gunmen demanded it be refueled and then proceed on to the capital. On the afternoon of December 26, while the plane was still sitting on the tarmac at Marseilles, commandos of the GIGN, France's elite counterterrorism force, stormed it using stun grenades and machine guns. Several passengers and commandos were injured in the firefight; all four of the GIA terrorists were killed. It was later discovered that if they had been able to take off again the gunmen had planned to crash the fully fueled plane into the Eiffel Tower. The suicide

"Terrorism takes us back to ages we thought were long gone if we allow it a free hand to corrupt democratic societies . . . "

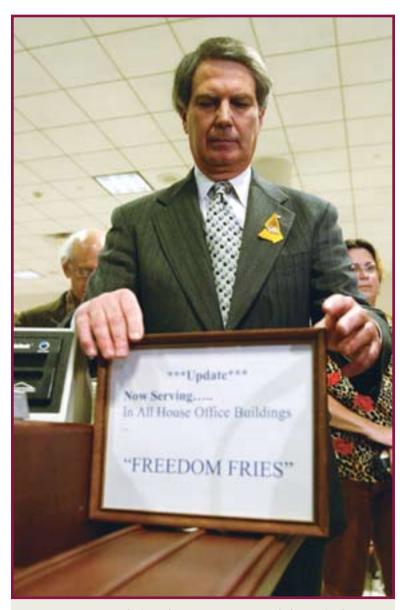
–Jacques Chirac

scenario that was eventually played out seven years later in New York and Washington, D.C. would have occurred first in France.

The GIA's failure did not prevent its attempting other terrorist acts in France. A year later, it was responsible for a series of bombing attacks on the country's railroad lines. In 1998, fearing that the group would try to disrupt the soccer World Cup being held in the country that summer, French authorities cracked down on known GIA sympathizers and arrested a large number of suspected conspirators. Other Islamist groups have also plotted terror campaigns in France. In 2001, shortly after the 9/11 attacks, French intelligence agents broke up an al Qaeda cell that was planning to destroy the U.S. Embassy in Paris. Chirac has been the target of a politically inspired assassination attempt himself, although from a white supremacist rather than Islamist group. On July 14, 2002—known in France as Bastille Day, the country's main holiday—he was shot at by a lone gunman while driving in a presidential motorcade down the Champs-Elysées. The gunman was quickly overpowered and was later sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment. At the beginning of 2006, the president announced that he was fully prepared to launch a nuclear counterstrike at any terrorist-sponsoring state that assisted in the use of weapons of mass destruction against his country. "Terrorism," he said, "takes us back to ages we thought were long gone if we allow it a free hand to corrupt democratic societies and destroy the basic rules of international life."

France, then, has had plenty of recent firsthand experience with the dangers of terrorism on its soil, and Chirac has taken what many would describe as an uncompromisingly tough line over the terror threat. Why, then, has France been perceived in the United States in the last few years as a less than willing partner in the Global War on Terror—even an opponent? Popular anti-French sentiment reached something of a crescendo in America in the years immediately following 9/11. There was a proposed boycott of French goods and a campaign to rename french fries "freedom fries" that reached as far as the U.S. House of Representatives (although the French themselves consider fries to be Belgian, not French). Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld referred dismissively to France as one of the countries of what he called "Old Europe," contrasting it with one of the supposedly more U.S.friendly states of "New Europe," such as Poland or the Czech Republic. Chirac was for a time the subject of intense personal vitriol, and he remains a highly unpopular figure across the Atlantic—something that the former Howard Johnson's employee must find deeply wounding. Why has the Franco-American relationship become so strained? The immediate answer can be put very simply—Iraq. In a deeper sense, however, it stems from the Fifth Republic's determination to carve out an independent role for itself in world affairs, keeping a clear distance from other allied countries and acting strictly in its own perceived best interests.

As with so many other things, General de Gaulle was the pioneer of this approach to diplomacy. De Gaulle worried that France's humiliating defeat in 1940 had so wounded his country's self-esteem that it would never again play a major role on the world stage, a fate he was determined to avoid. He was particularly worried that his superpower ally, the United States, would come to overshadow and dominate France's international relations. But de Gaulle was enough of a realist to appreciate that France was simply not strong enough to go



In recent years, relations between France and the United States have been strained. Because of the perceived lack of France's support following the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the United States imposed informal boycotts on many French goods. This included a change to the name of a popular snack, as shown by this congressman's sign.

it totally alone. He therefore sought a cautiously unilateralist approach, maintaining critical links with the United States and the rest of the West, while at the same time distancing himself somewhat from them. Under de Gaulle, France acquired its own nuclear deterrent and entered the space race, albeit only with modest results. Although remaining a nominal partner within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), de Gaulle removed all his country's forces from its military command structure in 1966 and requested that the troops of all other member nations leave French soil—a decision that was not reversed until 1993. Outside of Europe, de Gaulle provided generous sums of foreign aid to developing countries in Africa and the Middle East in order to develop strong friendly relations with them. The French arms industry particularly benefited from these growing connections; France developed a huge weapons export business, and it remains today the third-largest international supplier of armaments after the United States and Russia. Dassault, the aircraft manufacturer that employed Chirac's father, was one of the beneficiaries of the weapons trade.

Like his predecessors, Chirac felt the need to continue his country's distinctive and independent path in world affairs upon arriving at the Élysée. One of the first acts of his presidency was to resume nuclear weapons testing at Fangataufa, an isolated atoll within France's Polynesian territories (a legacy of the country's imperial past), after a three-year moratorium. This provoked widespread international criticism, which to some extent Chirac welcomed as an opportunity to demonstrate to the voters at home his preparedness to defy world opinion in the interests of France. The nuclear program in Polynesia was a highly contentious issue abroad. Quite apart from the environmental effects of the atomic blasts, France had been roundly condemned in 1985 when agents of its intelligence agency had conspired to sink the Greenpeace protest ship *Rainbow Warrior* in a New Zealand harbor,

because it was interfering with the test series. Indeed, it was partly as a result of that scandal that Mitterrand's then prime minister Laurent Fabius had to resign, and Chirac became the first cohabiting premier. Having detonated six bombs, the president agreed in February 1996 to an end to all nuclear testing in Polynesia, this time, he claimed, for good.

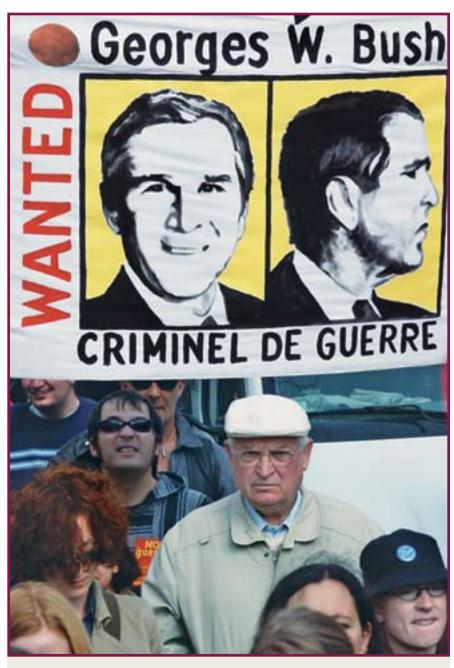
When the question of Iraq came to the world center stage after 2001, Chirac was placed in a difficult position. France had long courted Saddam Hussein's regime, regardless of the dictator's appalling record on human rights. More than \$25 billion in arms sales were made to Iraq before the first Gulf War in 1991. Even after United Nations sanctions were subsequently imposed on Saddam's state, France remained its most important export partner, providing pharmaceutical and medical equipment. In 1975, when he was d'Estaing's prime minister, Chirac traveled to Iraq to meet with Saddam, who was in the process of consolidating his stranglehold over that country. The two leaders negotiated a lucrative oil deal and also laid the foundations for Irag's purchase of a Frenchdesigned nuclear reactor, which was constructed in 1977 just outside Baghdad. Many believed that this was the first step in Saddam's plan to acquire nuclear weaponry, and in 1981, the Israeli government launched a surprise air strike at the facility, destroying it. France initially considered a request to help rebuild the plant, but, in 1984, facing international pressure, declined to do so.

In retrospect, this cozy relationship would come to look highly uncomfortable to France. In its defense it was of course able to point out that other countries, including the United States, had made equally poor choices of strategic partners in the recent past. During the Reagan administration, Donald Rumsfeld, who was then the president's special envoy to the Middle East, was the United States' main negotiator with the Iraqi government, which, at the time, America looked upon as a de facto ally in the region because of Saddam's war against

Islamist Iran. Like Chirac, Rumsfeld had met with the Iraqi leader in December 1983 and (prior to the first Gulf War) would boast that one of his most important political accomplishments had been the easing of relations between the two countries. As with the case of the French president, Rumsfeld would later come to find his earlier connections with Saddam a source of great embarrassment.

Whether because of selfish interests in Iraq, a stubborn refusal to kowtow to the United States, a desire to appease his strongly antiwar electorate, or a sincere belief that the planned invasion was a bad idea—or perhaps all four of these things at the same time—Chirac made it clear in early 2003 that he was opposed to the U.S.-led military intervention against that country. He was able to use France's position on the permanent United Nations Security Council to good effect, forestalling any UN resolution that would have expressly permitted an invasion by threatening to veto it beforehand. The United States condemned this attitude as a reckless use of the veto power, but French representatives were able to point out that the United States had often used its own veto in defiance of all the other members of the council. In any case, France was not alone: Russia and China, which also have UN vetoes, indicated that they too were unwilling to support military action, while in Europe the Germans were equally unenthusiastic. In the event, the United States and Britain, its chief ally in the Iraq crisis, recognized that it was impossible to force a UN resolution in the face of such opposition and in March went ahead with the invasion without a clear mandate. France, needless to say, declined to join this "Coalition of the Willing."

The government of George W. Bush reacted with barely disguised anger and contempt at this decision, implicitly scorning Chirac as an irresponsible appeaser of dictators. In countering this, the French president always insisted that he was no friend to the Iraqi regime, and that he wanted Saddam to disarm in accordance with previous United Nations resolutions. Chirac



Antiwar protestors march in Toulouse, France, on March 15, 2003. The demonstrators were rallying against the United States, which was about to declare war against Iraq. This sign reads: "George W. Bush: War Criminal."

claimed that no matter how tyrannous Saddam was, to invade his country without clear evidence of its intention to harm others was a violation of the basic principles of state sovereignty that had kept the world largely at peace since 1945. Even an ostensibly good cause could set a very dangerous precedent. "As soon as one nation claims the right to take preventive action," he said, "other countries will naturally do the same. If we go down that road, where are we going?" In any case, the huge unpopularity of the war within France itself made the decision to oppose Bush a politically logical one. To this day, despite Chirac's otherwise low approval ratings, his stance on Iraq is still considered by the majority of French voters to be one of his better decisions as president. The failure to find any weapons of mass destruction after the invasion and the great religious and ethnic disturbances that have erupted in that country since 2003 have, at least for now, seemed in many French eyes to have validated that decision.

The cost to Franco-American harmony because of the standoff on Iraq was, in the short term, considerable. French companies were excluded from the right to bid for contracts in post-liberation Iraq, a slap in the face after so many years of patient economic investment in that country. The personal relationship between Presidents Bush and Chirac, such as it ever was, appears to have been irreparably damaged, with the American leader pointedly snubbing his French counterpart at the 2006 G8 summit in St. Petersburg. However, these tensions should not be overstated. France and the United States share too many common interests for the two nations to remain at loggerheads for very long. France, with its large Muslim population, is as keenly aware of the dangers of extremist Islam as any other country. Other events in the Middle East have suggested that the worst of the quarrel is perhaps over. Chirac's government has been willing to take a much sterner line over Iran's nuclear ambitions than it did over the threat of Saddam. In the conflict between Israel and the Hizbollah paramilitary groups

in southern Lebanon, the French have been able to exploit their old colonial connections to the region, as well as the fact that they have not been tarnished in Arab eyes by association with the Iraq invasion. Together with the United States, they have sponsored a UN ceasefire initiative and a proposal to send in an international monitoring force to protect the Israel-Lebanon border. Whether this offer succeeds, it does hint at a thawing of the little cold war between Paris and Washington.

CHAPTER

9

France After Chirac

AT 9:50 P.M. ON THE EVENING OF JULY 9, 2006, FRANCE'S WORLD CAME crashing to an abrupt halt. It was the 110th minute of the World Cup soccer final against Italy in Berlin, with just 10 minutes of play left, and the score was tied at one goal each. A penalty kick shoot-out appeared inevitable—and the French had a demonstrated superiority at penalties, for they could rely on, among other fine strikers, their extraordinarily gifted captain Zinedine Zidane. "Zizou" was a true phenomenon, not only a genius on the pitch but also an example of everything that had gone right in France's multicultural experiment. Algerian by ancestry, he had risen to the top of his nation's sporting ladder and was regarded as a hero by French soccer fans of all creeds and colors. The World Cup final was also his last game before retirement, and it was looking as though he would end his career hoisting the Jules Rimet Trophy as he had done so triumphantly eight years earlier in Paris. Then,



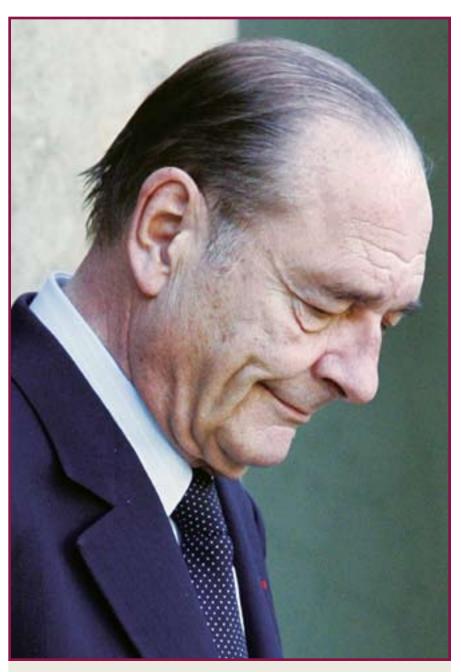
After France's crushing loss to Italy in the 2006 World Cup, French soccer star Zinedine Zidane met with Jacques and Bernadette Chirac. Zidane's inexplicable actions on the field not only shocked fans around the world but also resulted in his dismissal from the game, a crucial loss to his team, and his country.

for reasons that still remain unclear, he had a terse exchange of words with Italian player Marco Materazzi. Suddenly, with the world looking on aghast, Zidane head butted the Italian in the chest. The referee promptly dismissed him from the pitch in disgrace. Reeling from the shock, and without their star captain, the French team never recovered their composure. In the penalty shoot-out, Italy took the lead and won the match, and the cup. For France, which had suffered a miserable year of riots, scandals, and political failures, defeat on the brink of victory was unbearable; the sober return to reality the

following day was even grimmer. "For a month," groaned the newspaper *Libération*, "France has been dreaming with Zidane. This morning, it wakes up to Chirac."

The president tried to put a brave face on it, warmly praising Zidane after his return to France, without a hint of the drama that had tarnished his final professional game. But no amount of damage control could change the fact that the lastminute loss had been another blow to the country's prestige in an already gloomy year, and in some vague indirect way Chirac was held to be responsible. Indeed, it is quite possible that the result of that World Cup game may have sealed the fate of France's president. Had his country won, the boost to national self-esteem might just have been enough to persuade him to try for a third run at the Élysée. As it is, it looks less and less likely that Chirac would stand a hope in such a melancholic public mood. His health in any case is not what it was; his suspected stroke in September 2005 apparently caused him some loss of vision, and he wears a hearing aid in one ear. At nearly 75 years old, it would seem an act of needless folly to put himself under the strain of a reelection campaign with so little chance of success.

So who will succeed the Bulldozer should he step down? Several rivals to the throne have already been quietly staking their claims. Initially, Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin was cited as a likely candidate, but the embarrassing failure of his work contract reforms at the beginning of 2006 did so much damage to his credibility that he is no longer seen as a strong challenger. The chief Gaullist contender is more likely to be Nicolas Sarkozy, the interior minister and current leader of the UMP. Sarkozy's tough if controversial line during the 2005 banlieue riots won him public attention and support from the conservatively minded middle classes, but he is also suspected of being that dreaded thing in France, an ultralibéral, and that may drain away some potential supporters in the political center. In the ranks of the Left, the most interesting potential



Jacques Chirac enjoys a moment of reflection on April 3, 2006. Chirac's legacy remains to be seen, but his decades of public service are a testament to his energy and vision.

candidate is Ségolène Royal, a prominent Socialist Party member who has the potential to be the Fifth Republic's first woman president. Le Pen is certain to stand again, and while he is not likely to win, many political observers will be watching nervously to see whether his surprise success in 2002 has raised his standing in the popular mind.

What will be the legacy of the Chirac presidency? No one could really call the Chirac years catastrophic; France and the Fifth Republic have survived, and he will bequeath to his successor a relatively strong, stable, and prosperous country. But the bold promises of change that Chirac offered on his arrival in 1995 have almost without exception been unfulfilled. Depending on one's point of view, France has either weathered the storm, evading the president's feckless and unnecessary attempts to meddle with a perfectly good system, or it has missed an opportunity, blundering on with the same broken status quo. Either way, Chirac has failed to make the impression upon French life that he had hoped. He has been around for as long as anyone can remember, but the young wolf of de Gaulle's and Pompidou's days has been found, in what was supposed to be the peak of his career, to be curiously toothless. He has been a competent enough steward of the Fifth Republic, but it is hard to imagine posterity looking back on the Chirac years with any real nostalgia. Days of Gaullist grandeur they were not.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1932 Chirac is born in Paris.
- 1940 Germany conquers France; the Vichy regime is established; General Charles de Gaulle flees to England to establish Free French government-in-exile.
- 1945 World War II ends; de Gaulle becomes provisional president.
- 1946 De Gaulle resigns presidency; the Fourth Republic is proclaimed.
- 1953 Chirac travels to the United States for the first time, spending a summer at Harvard.
- 1954 Battle of Dien Bien Phu; France withdraws from Indochina; Chirac graduates from the Institut d'Etudes Politiques de Paris.
- 1956 Chirac is drafted into the army as a junior officer and serves for a year in Algeria; marries Bernadette Chodron de Courcel.
- 1958 The Fourth Republic collapses; de Gaulle agrees to return to power under a revised constitution; the Fifth Republic is proclaimed.
- 1959 Chirac graduates from the École Nationale d'Administration.
- 1962 Chirac joins Prime Minister Georges Pompidou's personal staff; Algeria becomes independent, ending a bloody colonial war.
- 1967 Chirac is elected to the National Assembly and becomes state secretary for social affairs.

- 1968 Chirac becomes state secretary for the economy and finance; mass strikes and student protests paralyze France.
- 1969 De Gaulle resigns presidency and is succeeded by Pompidou.
- **1972** Chirac becomes minister of agriculture and rural development.
- 1974 Chirac briefly serves as minister of the interior; Pompidou dies and is succeeded as president by Valéry Giscard d'Estaing; Chirac becomes d'Estaing's prime minister.
- 1976 Chirac resigns as prime minister and founds his own political party, Rassemblement pour la République (RPR).
- 1977 Chirac is elected mayor of Paris (a position he holds until 1995).
- 1981 Chirac runs unsuccessfully for the presidency, being beaten by François Mitterrand.
- 1986 Mitterrand appoints Chirac as prime minister in the Fifth Republic's first cohabitation.
- 1988 Chirac resigns as prime minister and runs for the presidency; he is again beaten by Mitterrand.
- 1995 Chirac is elected president of France.
- 1997 Chirac calls legislative elections, but the Socialist coalition takes control of the National Assembly and he is forced into a five-year cohabitation with Lionel Jospin.
- **2002** Chirac defeats National Front candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen to become president for a second term. The

RPR merges with other Gaullist parties to form the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP). On Bastille Day (July 14), Chirac survives an assassination attempt.

- 2003 A U.S.-led coalition invades Iraq, unseating dictator Saddam Hussein; Chirac blocks UN approval of the invasion and is among the more vocal critics of America's policy.
- 2005 French voters reject the European Union's proposed new constitution; ethnic riots break out across France's suburbs following the deaths of two immigrant teenagers.
- 2006 There are major student protests across France because of proposed changes to youth employment laws; Chirac first promises to modify, and then abandons, the new work contracts.
- **2007** France to hold new presidential elections.

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